MAUREEN

BY
PATRICK
MACGILL

Irene Owen Andrews

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BY

PATRICK MacGILL

AUTHOR OF "THE CHILDREN OF THE DEAD END,"
"THE RATPIT," ETC.

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THE RACHARY WOR

Said Peadar Rachary Wor (God rest him)—
Man alive and no one could best him—
Cement in a bargain. In all things handy,
Thatching a haystack or mending a pandy.
His back wouldn't bend to the heaviest load,
And his feet were as sure on the hill as the road—
In warranty certain. When he departed
All his neighbors were broken-hearted,
And they gathered together and pondered o'er
The words and wisdom of Rachary Wor.
For thus he spoke:

"'Twas me to discover
That we twist the same rope over and over;
Some do it middling, others better,
The rope that leaves the hand of the letter.

"What do we know and what have we thought?
Much, but never as much as we ought.
For the hand may touch what the eye can't see,
And the mind's perplexed by the things that be.

"This thing or that thing? Read me the riddle,
And in through other strings come play the fiddle—
We come and we go, but the end is sure—
Kind word, act, and purpose. The three endure.

"Be good, be sure; but remember still
To a man his due and a woman her will.
Conceity the maid that's cuddled and kissed:
Ring her and then you'll spancell your wrist.
The lease with a bed is trying and long,
Like a hair in the mouth or a drunkard's song.
Bedding for one means comfort and ease,
But bedding for two and she's scratching your knees.

"Soft are her arms. A hangman's rope
Throttles surer when greased with soap.
Three things put years on a good man's life:

The curl in the gob of a scolding wife,
The purse in the petticoat he can't fill,
And the nagging tongue that is never still.

"Three things strong and the house is blest:
The table, the fire, and the hand to a guest.

"Three sounds of increase: a lowing cow,
The smithy sparks, the swish of a plow.

"Three are the tokens of goodly dress:
Elegance, comfort, and lastingness.

"Three hands and the world its best will yield:
The hand in the smithy, the byre, and the field.

"What's needed is needed right away;
Don't cut the scollops on a windy day.

"The back of my hand to her at the door
Who never adds weight to the poor man's store.
The same to him on his chair all day
That jabbers and gabs with nothing to say.

"To all: Be patient and good and kind,
And leave a name that will live behind."

It was thus he spoke, the Rachary Wor,
A man of substance and goodly store;
And he left his holding, his hearth, and home,
And they buried him deep in the graveyard loam.
They carried him there one Lammastide,
And it's seventeen years past since he died.
Still they pray for him now as they did of yore,
For the soul of the good man Rachary Wor.

MAUREEN

CHAPTER I

Eamon na Sgaddan

I

EAMON NA SGADDAN was a famous man in the parish of Dungarrow. All knew him; even the tiniest children as yet hardly able to articulate two consecutive words knew Eamon na Sgaddan. If one of them happened when resting in its mother's arms to see a stranger come down the parish road, it would turn to its mother and say, "Eamon Chaddan." Of course it might not be Eamon. Probably the stranger was a woman from the top of the hills, a beggarman from Frosses, or a cowdrover from the very heel of the barony. But to the children, especially to the very young, anything strange and out of the ordinary that moved on two feet was personified in Eamon na Sgaddan.

All the good folk of the parish, the parish of Dungarrow with its acres of hill and holm and its strong farmers, knew him by name. When they met him on the road they greeted him with, "Good day, Mr. Brogan!" or, "Fit and fine the day, Mr. Brogan!" or, "It's the grand weather that's in it now, thank God, Mr. Brogan." Of course not one had the temerity or bad breeding to call him Eamon na Sgaddan to his face. Above everything else Dungarrow knew its manners, especially when in the company of Mr. Brogan.

Not alone did the simple people greet him with respect, but the parish priest was not above addressing him as

"Sir." Even the doctor was once heard to say, "Beg your pardon, Mr. Brogan," when he did not catch some remark made to him by Eamon at the harvest fair of Stranarachary. The method of salutation used by the priest and the doctor carried great weight in Dungarrow, and of course the parishioners felt bound to follow the lead of the physicians of soul and body.

This exceptional honor given to a man of the people by the people was something beyond the ordinary, but not out of place when we consider the man to whom the honor was given. Other people in their various ways were good and worthy, but none was able to rise to the lofty pinnacle on which Eamon na Sgaddan was placed. Of course all the natives were hard workers, as zealous in their various pursuits as Eamon na Sgaddan in his, but none rose to his height. "He was born to it," the people said, not meaning that he was actually by birth entitled to repute and renown that descended from his forbears, but on the contrary, signifying that in him Eamon had the seed of greatness.

In what his greatness consisted it is perhaps difficult to say. He was not a man of substance, as substance is generally computed in Dungarrow, in house property, in stock and land. He had, of course, a little plot of ground, stuck on the side of Meenaroodagh brae, looking for all the world like the hind leg of a dog. Spadeland some of it was, but of the poorest quality and unable to father a decent crop of sgiddins. It rose up from the road towards the hills; and fifty yards from the highway stood Eamon's house, a ramshackle building that let the rain through roof and wall in the slightest shower. It consisted of one apartment, and here dwelt Eamon na Sgaddan, his cow, a bony animal called Rompy, a cat without name or tail (no one thought worth while to give it the former, and the latter was cut off by a scythe as the animal hunted corn-crakes through the meadows), and a dog half blind, eternally busy with the fleas which made its shaggy coat their dwelling-place. The dog was named "Copenhagen."

The man took no care of the place, never thatched the

roof, cleaned the floor or milked the cow. In fact he never did any manual labor, save cooking his breakfast in the morning, dressing himself and walking down to the village. Here he stopped all day, speaking to all and sundry, listening to any and every conversation and buying or borrowing newspapers when they happened to come to the village.

He came back late in the evening, moving up the county road with a long, swinging stride, mumbling to himself, now and again stopping on his way and putting his hand to his brow as if trying to recall something which had slipped his mind. If a passer-by saw him then and spoke, Eamon would not answer. He would stare at the speaker, then at his own hand, which he would stretch out four fingers extended and the thumb pressed in against the palm. "Incomprehensible!" he would exclaim, to himself of course, as if puzzling over something which he could not fathom. The word "Incomprehensible" was a favorite one with the man, but now and again he would give utterance to words quite as long and high-sounding. "Counter-revolutionary" was another word which he used more than once. "Cosmopolitan" and "Entirely without precedent," he had been heard to say.

What he thought of when giving utterance to these exclamations it was impossible to tell, but one or two half-baked youngsters, sciolists who prided themselves on their education, insinuated that Eamon himself did not know what these words meant, that he read them in a newspaper and spoke them just to pretend that he was a learned man. "Showing off he was, the old plaisham," said these youngsters. But Dungarrow would not listen. They knew Eamon na Sgaddan—Mr. Brogan—who always wore a collar and tie even when he deigned to work with a spade in the field.

Ordinary people termed digging "spadework." Not so Mr. Brogan. With him it was "husbandry." Turf to him was "turbary;" a bowl of tea "a slight modicum of beverage." To him a drunken man was "an inebriated person," a close-fisted neighbor "a parsimonious individual."

Thus it can be easily understood how Dungarrow with its estimation for learning would not hear its Mr. Brogan slighted even when he stopped for a moment on the road to utter mighty words which none could understand. It was Learning, and a man with the learning in his head could not be looked on in the same light as ordinary men.

II

Dungarrow treated Eamon with courtesy and he returned the courtesy a thousandfold. Biddy O'Donnel, nicknamed "Leggy" on account of the length of her lower limbs, was Miss O'Donnel to Eamon. When he met her on the road he raised his hat with a graceful flourish, passed it from the right hand to the left, stretched forth the hand that was free and grasped that of Miss O'Donnel. But the handshake was not an ordinary one. In it there was something graceful and refined, something so superb that the other men of the place could never copy it. When he passed the hat to the left hand he grasped it tenderly with thumb and fingers as if it were a child, nestling it in against his breast and resting the rim on the shoulder. Then, pressing his right elbow to his side, he raised his forearm upwards, fingers tightly together and thumb standing apart like an interested spectator, turned it down at the wrist and brought it towards the lady with a slow, graceful motion and touched Biddy's wrinkled hand. There was something extraordinary in the whole movement. "It's the quality toss that's in Mr. Brogan's handshake," the people said.

Yes, that was the secret of the man's success and popularity. He had the quality toss about him. This was in keeping with his rôle as a public character, a picturesque symbol of the heights to which a man may rise in his own arm of the world. Whatever he did was noted by the people and spoken of afterwards. If he figured for a moment in any public function, a meeting of a local society for example, the affair attained additional eminence by Eamon's presence. If he spoke, the others repeated his remarks, weighed

them, analyzed them, and took stock of them from various angles.

Once it happened that there was a dispute between two families, the Sweeneys and the Gallaghers, concerning a right of way towards the moors and upper grazing-grounds of Dungarrow. It was decided to settle the dispute by placing the facts of the matter before the elders of the townland and acting on their judgment. Eamon na Sgaddan was also invited to attend, not because the matter was any concern of his but simply on account of the pre-eminence which the man enjoyed in the locality.

The case came before the gray-bearded and venerable patriarchs of the place. Coy Fergus Beeragh, wise in jurisprudence and famed for his ability in restoring order in many a chaos of contention, was in the chair. Proceedings opened at nine o'clock in the morning, when the Gallaghers stated their case.

The boreen, or lane, leading up through the awlth to a braeface, bounden on one side by the Sweeneys' farm and on the other by the land of the Gallaghers, belonged to the Gallaghers from time immemorial. It was owned by Hugh Ruagh Gallagher that was great-grandfather of the Gallaghers now living. All the old people of the parish knew that. Breed Heila, God rest her! who died thirty years ago come next Candlemas, testified and swore before the parish priest of her time that Hugh Ruagh Gallagher that was had the right of way of the awlth and its caisin without let or hindrance through all the years of his life. He was a man respected by all the neighbors in his day, and if it were not fair and above-board to have the use of that caisin for his animals he would not use it.

In this way did the Gallaghers put their case forward, now and again interrupted by the Sweeneys, who could show that the man named Hugh Ruagh Gallagher was not altogether such a worthy being as his descendants made him out to be; that, in fact, he had been once guilty of sheep-stealing and another time of selling a faulty horse to his next-door neighbor, who was a forbear of the Sweeneys of to-day.

"Speak no ill of the dead," said the Gallaghers. "They can't speak back."

An admirable precept this, but unfortunately forgotten by the Gallaghers when the other party spoke of the merits of the Sweeneys who had gone before. Noon came, and the discussion was not at an end: at one o'clock the ancient and wrinkled Coy Fergus Beeragh remarked that it was dinner time, "and be the look iv it," he added, "we'll never make hilt or hair iv this matter."

It was then that Mr. Brogan spoke.

"Both parties, anti and pro, are spreadeagled on a Serbonian bog," he said. "Matters can be simplified and the problem eradicated if both parties, anti and pro, agree to use the obstacle of contention in common."

With these words he got to his feet and, without casting a glance at any one in the room, he went out sideways through the door.

"That will make matters aisy if both parties, anti and pro, agree," said Coy Fergus Beeragh, who, though loth to allow the matter to be settled by Eamon na Sgaddan, felt in need of his dinner. "Shake hands on the matter," he said, "and make the right iv way common property to the two iv yees, Gallaghers and Sweeneys."

The parties agreed and in this way, the matter being brought to a sound conclusion, added fresh laurels to Mr. Brogan's name, discretion and sound judgment.

III

In a parish like Dungarrow, beyond railway reach, where every man knows his neighbor and the strength of the neighbor's house in style, stock, and substance, it is a common thing to find people shorn of their patronymics and given instead a name which signifies their vocation, place of dwelling, or physical peculiarity. This, in places where remnants of the ancient clan system still flourish, is in a degree necessary. In a townland of twelve families where

the O'Friels, for example, predominate, it may be possible to find eight Paddy O'Friels, and the locality being so confined, it takes some trouble to differentiate one particular Paddy amongst the seven others.

Special methods are therefore adopted to meet the difficulty. One male is known as Paddy Paddy Beag (Paddy the son of Little Paddy), another as Paddy Paddy Wor (Paddy the son of Big Paddy), a third as Paddy Paddy a Waura (Paddy the son of Paddy the son of Mary), etc., etc.

But in no way like this did Mr. Brogan get his by-name, Eamon na Sgaddan. He was not named after a vocation as Paddy a Greasaid (Paddy the Shoemaker), nor after the place where he lived like Paddy a Crick (Paddy of the Hill), nor from a physical peculiarity like Paddy Cam (Crooked Paddy). In fact, and rightly, Mr. Brogan obtained his cognomen from his own scholarly attainments when these were used in championing the food value of the everyday, simple, inoffensive and humble article of diet —the homely sprat.

It happened one day that some neighbors, Coy Fergus Beeragh amongst them, went into Mr. Brogan's house and found the worthy man, hatless, bootless and collarless, preparing his breakfast. On the table stood a pandy of tea, a paper horn of sugar, a jug of milk, a thick slice of bread and butter and two duck eggs newly laid and newly boiled. This in itself was a good repast for a sound, healthy man with a day's work in front of him "but overmuch," the neighbors said afterwards, "for a man the cut iv a plucked gosling with guts that would hardly fill the skin iv an eel. And him a scholar, too!"

But not alone in table fare did Mr. Brogan offend the susceptibilities of the peasantry, who saw there something at variance with their preconceived ideas of a scholar's appetite. The fireplace added still more evidence of the man's eating powers. On the greeshaugh, leveled handsmooth with the back of a shovel, were a number of roasting sprats, spluttering, hissing and turning their tails up

as if the heat was instilling the essence of resurrection into the dead, diminutive things.

"Roastin' a sgaddan or two for yer breakfast, Mr. Brogan?" asked Coy Fergus Beeragh, with a malicious chuckle. He was envious of Eamon's reputation as a scholar.

"These sardines, you mean," said Eamon, catching one by the tongs and placing it on the floor. "Infinitesimal to look at," he added, "but their food value is superb."

"They go well with duck eggs," said Coy, casting a sly glance at the table.

"I never masticate eggs," said Eamon.

Coy, a man who knew things, but not a scholar, did not want to profess ignorance of the word "masticate" by asking Eamon what he really meant, so he chose to remain silent.

"I give eggs to my canine friend, Copenhagen," said Eamon, pointing to the dog which sat on its hunkers near the door, scratching its shaggy coat with a paw in the hope of raking out that which its teeth could not find.

"Duck eggs to a dog!" exclaimed Coy, shaking his head and waving his fists in a condemnatory gesture. "It's a mortal sin, Mr. Brogan. To a dog! To that bundle iv hair and maggots."

"Even dogs must get the wherewithal of life," said Eamon.

"And ye put yerself on sprats when a dog ates eggs like a Christian?" asked Coy.

"Necessity knows no law," said Eamon, with a superb wave of his hand. "As a martyr to dyspepsia and flatulence, I find in sardines Nature's own remedy for the ills which flesh is heir to. Mr. Beeragh"—he raised his voice and looked at the roof—"Mr. Beeragh, if the ladies of this nation consumed more sardines, the medical profession would become bankrupt."

Afterwards it was noticed in the parish that sprats were held in higher esteem by the Dungarrow housewives, and from then on, Mr. Brogan, the first man to bear testimony to their worth and consequence, became known to one and all as Eamon na Sgaddan (Edward The Sprat).

IV

Eamon left his native townland every year about the middle of May and did not return again until the following October. Where he went to was a mystery known to none save himself. At least, it was not known to anybody in the parish of Dungarrow. In May Mr. Brogan let his land, its meadow, grazing, and turbary, to the highest bidder, and disappeared. "I am shortly going abroad on business," he would say prior to his departure. That was all, but for a week this would be sole topic of conversation in the neighborhood.

"Now what can be the kind iv business that Mr. Brogan does?" the people asked one another. "He's very close about it, whatever it is." "There's money in it anyway," they would admit, for it was well known that Mr. Brogan always came back at the heel of the year with silver to spare and spend.

Then he would go secretly. Probably one evening he would be seen coming back from the village, mumbling to himself as usual. At this time of the year he might now and again take notice of a neighbor on the road, and reply to a question.

"Not away on business yet, Mr. Brogan?" he might be asked.

"Orders not to hand so far," he would reply, stand for a moment as if considering the answer which he had given, then without another word walk away.

Perhaps he had gone the next morning, vanished into the unknown.

Did he go by a wheeled vehicle, drawn by horse or moved by steam? Did he walk? Nobody knew, but the fact remained that Mr. Brogan was absent from his circle for the five months following.

The neighbors were of course full of curiosity as to Mr. Brogan's movements abroad. Some said that he dealt in eggs, others in tea or whisky. Business did not mean ordinary work, of course, such as using a spade on a farm or a pick in a railway cutting. Other young men went away

from the locality yearly, some to navvy, others to work on railways or farms. Of course that was not business; it was simply ordinary labor, in which money was earned by the hard sweat of the brow. But Mr. Brogan would not demean himself by sinking to the ordinary commonplace of losing sweat to gain money. He was a being who always wore a collar at home and who would wear it abroad, as befitted Mr. Brogan, the quality man.

But a veil of secrecy, when worn for a long time, is apt to become thin in fabric, as the strongest window-blind, after years of wear, is liable to let the light through. So with the blind which hid the movements of Mr. Brogan in his yearly absence from Dungarrow. At the beginning the people were filled with a burning curiosity. "Why does he go away like this?" they asked. "There's something funny in it." But the window-blind was well drawn. Not a ray of light could be seen at any corner.

Then came the supposition. "He may go away on business," the people said, "but he has to go every year, just the same as them that goes to the harvest beyont the water. He has money back with him iv course, but all who comes home has money with them when it nears the heel of the year. I wouldn't wonder if it is to the harvest that he goes and it the harvest-time, too. And he steals away like a person that's after a neighbor's turf in the dark. It's not much iv a business that will call on a man to hide it as he does." The fabric of the blind was wearing thin.

Then came the man—young Searlas Dhu O'Friel of Drimeeney—who traveled by boat from Derry to Greenock and who saw in that boat Mr. Brogan, carrying as luggage the contents of a red woolen kerchief. In fact, Mr. Brogan was going to business with a harvestman's bundle.

"So the two of us are on the same boat," said Searlas Dhu, when he saw Eamon.

"We are, Searlas," said Mr. Brogan, and a woe-begone expression settled on his face as he spoke. "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn, for as I sat down in Ferryquay Hotel, Derry, to a slight modicum of beverage, the sleep came over me and when I woke up, lo

and behold! if my luggage wasn't disappeared. But business being pressin' I couldn't wait, so I put a few necessaries in this red abomination and here you see me."

"And did the thief collar your money, too?" asked the inquisitive Searlas.

"Fifty pounds in gold," said Mr. Brogan, with a sigh. "Fifty pounds and here I'm traveling steerage, a thing I've never done before."

When Searlas Dhu came home from Scotland at the end of the year, he told of his meeting with Mr. Brogan. Dungarrow lent a ready ear to the tale, and with the same readiness declared it false, not so much because Mr. Brogan was a Dungarrow man as because Searlas Dhu O'Friel hailed from the townland of Drimeeney. Dungarrow contains thirty-seven townlands, thirty-six and Drimeeney, which happens to be an outcast arm of the parish, unloved and unhonored. The devil, as is well known, tampers with God's handiwork, and even Dungarrow offers an illustration of this fact. God made it, but the devil came in and fashioned Drimeeney. The people who dwelt there, red-haired crabbit folk, men who would lend you a rope to hang yourself and charge your relatives interest on the rope, women hard as the hob of hell who would steal a mouse from a blind kitten, and children fed on the blood of a black cat, and evil disposed towards the world all through their lives. Lucky for Mr. Brogan and his parish prestige that he was seen on the Derry boat with a harvester's bundle by a Drimeeney man.

But alas for Eamon na Sgaddan that year! A next-door neighbor of his own, a red-haired youngster named Columb Ruagh Keeran, out of work in Scotland and tramping the country from farm to farm looking for a job, happened to come across Mr. Brogan one day near Paisley, emptying dung-wagons on a free coup.

"Mother of God!" said the man. "And is it yourself that's in it, Eamon?"

Not Mr. Brogan, but simply "Eamon." And this from a Dungarrow man! But, after all, what could he expect, being discovered under such circumstances? A Mr. Brogan

could not descend to the menial task of emptying manure from a cart. It was a job for an Eamon, the menial toil of an ordinary man. Mr. Brogan stared vacantly at Columb Ruagh, stroked a hairy chin with calloused fingers, rubbed the open neck of a red flannel shirt with his other hand and burst into tears.

V

The secret was revealed, the blind withdrawn, and instead of being dazzled by the glare of a mighty business establishment as was anticipated, Dungarrow, in the person of Columb Ruagh Keeran, choked in the fetor of a dung-wallow.

Columb Ruagh stared at the wagon, at the dung, the graip which Mr. Brogan held in his hand, then at Mr. Brogan himself. He looked the man up and down, at his dung-flaked boots, his draggled, bell-mouthed corduroy trousers, with their knee-straps topping the calves, and their suspenders fastened to the waist by nails. The red flannel shirt, buttonless, showed a hairy, sallow chest, and torn, a punched belly naked to the navel. In paucity of paunch, inconcinnity of parts and lack of symmetry, Eamon somehow had the appearance of an unfledged gosling.

"Well, Mother iv Mercy!" said Columb Ruagh, in the tone of a man suddenly confronted by a wondrous spectacle which he cannot explain, "who'd have ever looked for you here, Eamon. Is this where you always come to when you leave home?"

"This is what I do," said Eamon, with awkward diffidence, the tears running from his eyes.

"And us all back home thinkin' that it's away on business that ye are," said Columb, in a slow, thoughtful tone, as if trying to set this strange discovery in its proper perspective. "And this is what ye're at all the time?"

"All the time," said Eamon. As he spoke his eyes lit up as if something new and beneficent had occurred to him. "All the time now," he added. "So much depended

in my life on the ebb and flow of the market, the rise and fall of shares. To-day, Mr. Keeran, we rest on the lap of luxury, to-morrow we shelter our weary bodies in the workhouse ward."

"Just thought iv that, haven't ye now?" said Columb cruelly, his wonder suddenly evaporating, and a crafty, calculating leer settling in the corner of his eyes. "Goigah, when ye were at home one would think that butter wouldn't melt in yer mouth, and here I find ye tellin' such lies. I never thought that iv ye, Eamon, never would even it to ye."

"You don't take my word for what I say?" asked Eamon, fixing tearful eyes on Columb Ruagh.

"Well, if ye want me to take yer word, I'll take it," said the young man casually, with a sidelong glance. "I'll take any man's word if it comes to that, but all the same what is the good iv a word, when ye're half starved and out on the roads trampin' the causeys in from the shriek iv day till night, with never a penny piece in yer pocket or a bite iv anything to warm yer guts. Then ye come to a man, a towney iv yer own on business (from what he says), and all that he'll give ye is his word. Damn yer word's what I say, Eamon, when there's nothin' with it."

"I've a piece in my handkerchief and a drop iv tay in the bottle that's at the fut iv the slope under my coat," said Eamon.

"Is the tay cold?" asked Columb, sitting on his hunkers and looking at Mr. Brogan.

"It's cold," Eamon assented.

"Well, the curse iv hell on it, then," said Columb in an irate voice. "It's not a skinful iv cold tay that I want, Eamon. It's somethin' else and can you guess what it is?"

"What is it?" asked Eamon lamely.

"Money," said Columb, springing to his feet with a vigorous bound, and opening and closing his fists. Eamon, affrighted, stepped back a pace. Columb was a young and vigorous man, supple as a hare and strong as a bull. In him vast, mysterious forces seemed to be sullenly reposing,

but ready at any moment to burst their bonds and explode like a thunderstorm. "Money is what I want," he roared with an evil chuckle. "I would cut the head off iv a man for a shillin'!"

"God look on us!" said Eamon, with a gasp.

"Yes, that's what I'd do," said Columb, emphasizing the averment. "I haven't broke bread for two days, and I haven't seen what buys it for two months. Some men are damned lucky," he growled, and glowered at Eamon. "They can get work, and when they see their poor towneys on the dead end all that they can offer them is a bottle iv cold tay."

"But the times are bad for every one," said Eamon, pulling his shirt front together with nerveless fingers.

"You'll tell me next, I suppose, that ye haven't a job," said Columb maliciously. "What screw d'ye get on this shift?"

"Twenty-one shillings a week."

"And the rest," said Columb. "Have ye anything to spare?"

"Half a crown," said Eamon tentatively, feeling in his trousers pockets. The shirt came open again.

"No good to me," said Columb, with the air of a man giving a verdict beyond appeal. "And ye've a damned sight more money than that. You get a bothie here to sleep in, don't ye?" he inquired.

"I do," said Eamon.

"I've heard iv this place," said Columb. "I met men that worked here. And ye pick pieces of coal from the coup and make yer fire?"

"I do," Eamon acquiesced.

"And ye get pratees free and milk for next to nothing," Columb proceeded.

"Well, yes," said Eamon with some hesitation as if Columb's last statement was in some measure open to contradiction.

"So, takin' it all in all, this is a damned good job," said Columb with hurried insistence as if determined to prevent Eamon from speaking. "All ye've to buy for yerself

is maybe a loaf and a bit iv steak and a taste iv tay and sugar, and ye live like a king when a towney iv yer own is put hard to it, lyin' in under bridges at night and travelin' belly boast be day. And ye offer him a half-crown, and ye without chick or child to make any claim on ye when ye're at home. Be a towney, Eamon, be a towney! Slide me out three pounds and let me get out on my own again!"

"I can't spare it," said Eamon weakly.

"A business man," said Columb cynically.

"I'll make it ten shillin's," said Eamon.

"Three pounds," replied the inflexible Columb.

"I haven't got it."

"Give me three pounds and I'll let you down light, Mr. Brogan," Columb replied. "That, and never a word will they hear in Dungarrow about me meetin' you here. You'll be Mr. Brogan next winter as well as last winter. Columb Ruagh won't give the show away."

"Say a pound and never speak about meetin' me here," Mr. Brogan mumbled in a thick voice; conflicting emotions, the desire to economize, the vanity of parish prestige and fear of the mighty Columb Ruagh glutting his utterance.

Columb cast a swift, penetrating glance around, taking stock of the country-side. Not a soul was in sight. The man's lips shut tightly, as if he had come to a sudden decision. He stepped up to Eamon.

"Look here," he said, in a tense whisper. "I want three pounds. Fork it out and let me slide. If you don't I'll wring your neck off and put an end to your business. Now, into your pocket and out with it!"

White with terror, Eamon groped in the pocket of his trousers, drew out a purse and emptied the contents in his hand.

"Two pounds eighteen," he said in a trembling voice. "That's all that I have in the world. Take it and leave me my lone."

Columb caught the money and shoved it into the pocket of his waistcoat.

"Well, I'll never let them know in Dungarrow how I've

met ye," he said graciously. "So *slan leat,* Mr. Brogan, I'm off!"

Two weeks later Columb met another Dungarrow laborer in Glasgow, and despite the assurance given to Mr. Brogan, he gave this man a detailed account of the incident on the free coup: how Mr. Brogan, without collar and tie, dressed in a red flannel shirt and corduroy trousers, was encountered busily emptying dung from a Glasgow Corporation wagon; how Eamon wept when he was discovered there, and told a cock-and-bull story about a business that went smash; how Eamon's dinner consisted of a piece in a red handkerchief and cold tea in a beer-bottle, etc., etc. Columb Ruagh, though not having the forbearance to refrain from mentioning this incident, had the grace, we must admit, to add that he felt sorry for the poor man. Needless to say, Columb said nothing concerning the affair of the three pounds. This being a mere domestic concern of interest to none save Columb Ruagh and Eamon na Sgaddan, it was not considered worthy of notice.

Thereupon light in relation to the secret movements of Eamon na Sgaddan filtered through to Dungarrow, and finding out what the man had striven to conceal, all local interest in his life evaporated. He was just an ordinary man, a plaisham, a fool, one who strove to act a part for which he was not fitted and to which he was not entitled. True, he had big words, but did he know what these words meant? True, he settled the dispute between the Gallaghers and Sweeneys, but did not everybody in the parish see from the very beginning that this was the only manner of settling the right-of-way matter? True, he wore a collar and tie, but then any man if he had the same impudence and face as Eamon na Sgaddan could wear a collar and tie. In fact, the people with a new sense of values saw that Eamon na Sgaddan was no better than themselves, that, in fact, he was not as good as his neighbors. He was nothing more nor less than a lazy rake, not fit to do a hand's turn for himself. Mr. Brogan indeed! No Mr. Brogan in future! From now onward he would be known as the simple plaisham, Eamon na Sgaddan. Wait till

he came home at the heel of the year! They would show him!

VI

But before Eamon na Sgaddan came home new events transpired which did a lot to change the outlook of the Dungarrow people, especially of mothers who had daughters of marriageable age. Tague Meehal Padraig, one of the oldest men in the locality, died at the age of ninety-four, leaving behind him a well-stocked farm, containing sixty acres or thereabout, situate in the townland of Meenaroodagh, held under the Marquis of Bristol at the low half-yearly judicial rent of four pounds, seven shillings and sixpence. The lands which adjoined the county road leading from Greenanore to Frosses were well fenced, drained and watered, and in high state of cultivation, containing six acres of ground suitable for cropping, three acres turbary, and the remainder first-class grazing-ground. Tague Meehal Padraig lived all alone in his home and employed day laborers to do the work of the farm. Before dying he made a will leaving the farm to his next of kin, the neighbor across the march ditch, who was his nephew Eamon na Sgaddan.

Eamon na Sgaddan returned home as usual towards the end of October, attired in pomp, and wearing his collar and tie, his heart filled with the hope that probably Columb Ruagh did not tell the Dungarrow people what he had seen abroad. The first person he met on alighting from the mail-car at the village of Stranarachary (population 211, public houses 7, police 8) was his neighbor the venerable Coy Fergus Beeragh, the authority on by-law and popular jurisprudence.

"Back to us again, Mr. Brogan," said Coy, shaking the stranger's hand with both his own. "Back again to fame and fortune?"

"I'm delighted to see you, Mr. Beeragh," said the returned business man. "After long absence it delights my heart to come again to the old surroundings."

"And it'll delight ye much more when ye hear what's to hear, Mr. Brogan," said Coy Fergus Beeragh, with a cunning wink. "Much and away more, me laddybuck!"

Mr. Brogan winced a little. The term laddybuck was one which had never been applied to him before, at least not since he grew to be a man and wore the white collar.

"And what is this sensational disclosure?" he asked, the ancient pride of the collared scholar giving tone and address to the utterance.

"What is it that's up me sleeve, ye mane?" said Coy Beeragh, giving Mr. Brogan a nudge on the ribs with his elbow and again winking. "It's somethin' that doesn't often occur in the parish iv Dungarrow, Mr. Brogan. The last time a thing like it took place was fifty years ago and me a wee boy not more than the height iv two turf with me heels in the ashes and the A B C's on me legs. And it was a divil iv a wee boy that I was in them days, Mr. Brogan, a divil entirely. And it was the fast legs that I had in undher me, for I could scoot across the brae-face like a hare. I mind once and me so wee, when me Granny, dead and gone this many a long year, God rest her, lifted the birch to give me a skelp because it was up to some divilment that I was, and I jouked out iv her reach and legged it first one way and then another so that she couldn't lay her hands on me, and me only two years ould at the time."

"But about this sensational disclosure?" asked Mr. Brogan, his curiosity at bursting-point.

"I'm comin' to that, me boy, I'm comin' to that as hard as I can," said Coy Fergus Beeragh with a knowing nod. "It's a great bit iv news entirely, and never was the like iv it in all the barony and for the matter iv that in all the four corners iv Ireland itself. Everybody's talking about it and sayin' this and that about it up and down the road every night iv the week for the past month. When we heard it in me own house, Biddy herself thanked God for it, and young Norah, me daughter, put her two hands together like this"—Coy pressed two miry palms together, pressed his beard with his fingers and looked up at the sky as if saying his prayers—"like this, and says: 'To every

soul its due, and the man that has come in for this stroke iv luck deserves it more than any one else in the whole world.' ''

''But who was the fortunate individual?'' Mr. Brogan inquired, feeling that Coy, speaking in parenthesis and allowing digression to outrun the boundaries of the matter in hand, would never get to the pith of the story.

''Who is it, ye ask, Mr. Brogan?'' said Coy, catching the questioner again by the hand. ''Who is it that has come into luck, that has come to the rainbow's butt and got the crock iv gold, if there's a crock iv gold to be got there, which I sadly misdoubt? I mind an old woman, named Maura Fargortha, that lived on the other side iv Drimin Cloghan in the days that are long gone. She was called Maura Fargortha because she was so thin that she was nothin' more than a bag iv bones. Some said it was decline, but others said that it was nothin' more or less than the hunger that was consumin' all the oil in her body and her wastin'. Well, this Maura one day took the notion into her head that she would set out over the hills and go to the butt iv the rainbow and get the crock iv gold that was hid there. I mind her settin' out on the journey and me not more than three at the time, for it's the great memory that I have entirely. I mind it as well as yesterday and me comin' close on sixty now with three sons be the wife that was, Mary Liam, God rest her, and a daughter, Norah, by the wife that is, Rosha Kelly. It's often that the two iv them bees asking about ye now and wonderin' how you were getting on and ye away across the water on business. It's every night that the two iv them, when down on their knees, sayin' the Paidreen, finishes up with a prayer for all away from home, not forgettin' Mr. Brogan, the next-door neighbor. And Norah, the vagabone''—Coy shook his head in mock depreciation—''stays longer on her knees sayin' a prayer for your safety than she would for any one else at all, even the souls that are suffering torments in the flames iv purgatory. And what would ye think the age of Norah would be now, Mr. Brogan?'' asked Coy Fergus Beeragh.

"Well, I really cannot say," said the gallant Mr. Brogan, "but"—with grandiloquent courtesy—"whatever her age is, she doesn't look her years."

"That's what everybody says, even Father Dan, and it's often he passes the word with me when I meet him on the road," said Coy with an ingratiating gesture and the look of a man who has made a good stroke of diplomacy. " 'Twas only yesterday that I met his reverence, and 'Coy Beeragh,' says he, 'it's a long while now since I've seen ye at all and it's many a time I have the mind to go up to your own townland and visit ye to have a talk about old times.'

" 'It's a glad man that I'd be to see ye in my wee house,' says I. 'And it's a good cup iv tay that Norah will be able to set in front iv ye, and bread the like iv what was never baked, and butter that can't be made in any house in the parish, bar me own, for me daughter Norah is handy, both at the churn and the fryin'-pan.' 'She's a fine girl and all, that daughter iv yours, Coy,' says he. 'I saw her yesterday at the funeral of Tague Meehal Padraig, God rest him!' "

"Old Tague's dead then; deceased," Mr. Brogan exclaimed, and added, "God have mercy on his soul!"

"He has passed away," said Coy, and disclosed the wonderful secret with the same breath. "He has passed away and left his holdin' to yerself, Mr. Brogan."

For a moment Mr. Brogan was silent. He stared at Coy Fergus Beeragh, his mouth stupidly open and his fingers twitching as if on the point of clutching at something that might evade his grip. Then all at once he shook himself and casually arranged his tie.

"Is it true, Mr. Beeragh?" he asked, his tones tinged with a shade of feigned indifference, his mind a welter of vague possibilities.

"May I fall where I stand if there's a word iv lie in what I say," Mr. Beeragh answered. "The will is in the hands iv the priest, and who but yerself has most right to the holdin', and you the next iv kin iv Tague Meehal

Padraig? And the right dacent man he was, too. I mind once and that was many a long year back,''—and with much wealth of detail and innate tendency to stray from the straight path of the narrative into the by-lanes of irrelevancy, the old man proceeded to relate a story to which Eamon na Sgaddan, engrossed in a calculation of the value of the holding of his late uncle, paid not the slightest heed.

Even the most worthy scholar descends at times from the mount of learning to deal a little in ordinary material business. But this is done almost unconsciously, as a poet steps into a midden when gazing at the stars. Suddenly Brogan shook himself, righted his tie and looked at Coy Fergus Beeragh, who was now deep in his story.

''Was the demise sudden?'' asked Mr. Brogan. ''The demise of my worthy relative?''

''Tague Meehal Padraig, ye mane,'' said Coy. '' 'Twas sudden, God rest him! He was a hale and hearty man at the shut iv one day and gone from us the next. The two boys that's hired on him went to their work in the mornin', and not a hilt or hair iv smoke did they see rise from the chimney at all till it was noon. Then fearin' the worst they went up to the door and in, to find the poor man lyin' dead on his bed with his trousers on and the cat that was in the house lyin' on top iv him, and it sleepin'. Ye mind the cat, one like your own, that got its tail cut off be a scythe when it kept gaddin' through Sally Rourke's holm after corn-crakes the harvest two years ago? It's a hard life and all, when an old man dies and him not havin' chick or child iv his own to look after him. It's married that a man should get when he finds himself with nobody at all in his house and the holdin' under his care, a big handlin', not for one, but for two and more'n two. A married man has the pull iv everybody because there's a snug drop iv tay for him when he comes in from his work, and his stockin's darned and his trousers patched and his home kept tidy. A strong home he'll have and a bed iv com-

fort, for is it not an old sayin' that a man and woman is fit to make any bed warm in the coldest weather?"

"Sound philosophy," said Eamon na Sgaddan, who by this time was gradually coming to realize his good fortune. "Sound philosophy, Mr. Beeragh, sound philosophy. And what about a drink, a slight modicum of beverage in celebration of the event? Let's proceed to the licensed premises of Mr. O'Ryan."

"And wet our whistles, Mr. Brogan," Coy supplemented.

The two men went up the village street together and entered the licensed premises of Mr. O'Ryan, where Coy Beeragh called for two glasses of the best. These were drunk and a second two ordered, then a third two, Coy paying for all. He insisted on doing this; it was only a friendly action, heaping the honors of return on Mr. Brogan. Coy was glad to see Mr. Brogan, glad to be the first to tell him of his good fortune, and proud to be the neighbor of a man who had come into his own.

Of course he was a relation of Brogan's, far out it was true, but still a relation. If it were traced back far enough it would be seen that both were of the same stock and blood, far out of course, but not so far out. Brogan's grandfather married a Beeragh, and Brogan's father, a decent man and all, God rest him, often said that it was a first-class mingling of blood, the Beeragh's and the Brogan's, as could be seen to the present day by looking at Mr. Brogan, a fine man and scholar, who did more to settle disputes than the law of the land. From this Coy Fergus Beeragh, with the skill of a peasant diplomat, launched into an account of his own family, praising all the members of it in turn, not forgetting his daughter Norah, who was the best hand in the parish at baking a scone, sewing a shirt, and knitting a stocking.

"An exceptional girl, your daughter Norah," said Mr. Brogan, trying to get a word in edgeways, for all the talking was conducted by the old man.

"That's right, sir," said Coy with feeling. "One of the best, willin' and obligin' and—have another deoch, Mr. Brogan."

"Delighted," said Eamon na Sgaddan. "But it's my turn to pay for the modicum now. A business man of my standing can't allow you to pay for it all."

Under the charm of the good news and the influence of the liquor for which Coy paid, Mr. Brogan had forgotten all about the meeting with Columb Ruagh on the Paisley free coup.

"It's not you to pay for a drop iv this," said Coy Beeragh, emphasis in his voice. "Some other time, Mr. Brogan, some other time, but not now. I have money, too, Mr. Brogan, and can stand a wee deoch to the best iv them. Money! I have lashin's iv it. A hundred and twenty gold sovereigns are in the bank for Norah the day that she gets the ring on her finger. A hundred and twenty gold sovereigns, which shows ye that, old as I am, I am a man iv substance."

So Coy paid for the two glasses and for several which followed. Not that Eamon na Sgaddan would not have paid if he had been allowed the opportunity, but the old man was adamant in his determination, and persistent as well as prodigal in his hospitality. He drank glass for glass, speaking all the time, telling one incident after another with all the garrulity of old years, forgetting the threads of many stories and drifting into others as easily as a flooded stream, coming down a brae, runs into a million rivulets.

At half-past seven he began speaking, his hat thrust to the back of his head and one elbow leaning on the counter of the public house; at eight, the hat was farther back and both hands thrust into his trousers pockets, rattling the loose change which the pockets contained; at half-past eight he was sitting down, his hat pulled over his eyes and his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat; at nine he was still speaking, incoherently now, of Mr. Brogan, of Tague Meehal Padraig, and of the girl Norah with her dowry of one hundred and twenty pounds, money down, the day she got the ring. He was now lying on the floor, against the wall, pipe in one hand, an empty glass in the other and his hat missing.

VII

Though Coy Fergus Beeragh had succumbed to his few glasses of the best, Eamon na Sgaddan, younger and stronger, was more able to stand the influence of the liquor. Buying a bottle of whisky, he put it in his pocket, fixed a puzzled stare on the fallen Coy, muttered something about the hospitable inebriate and made his way out into the street and up the road to Meenaroodagh, his head filled with confused thoughts of his uncle's will, his own business prospects, and last but not least, with dreams of Norah Beeragh, who had one hundred and twenty pounds coming the day she got the ring on her finger.

Mr. Brogan, it must be admitted, had a weak spot in his heart for the fair sex, and he had been in love with most of the girls in the parish at some time or another, worshiping them from a distance, it is true, and seldom bold enough to get into closer intimacy with them, save when under the influence of whisky. But in matters of the heart he never had much success. Given a fair field and favor in matters of scholarly import, Mr. Brogan was denied similar latitude when it came to the field of love. Girls would speak kindly to him on the road and at the market, but when it came to seeing one of them home from a dance in the dark, Mr. Brogan was generally denied the opportunity. In tone, outlook and sympathy, he was too far removed from them; his long words formed a barrier which the girls feared. They didn't understand them. So why trouble about him and his words? Anyway he was a plaisham, looking over his collar like a donkey over a whitewashed wall—so the girls with the cruelty of their sex declared. And catch a Dungarrow girl marrying a plaisham even though he were a scholar.

Taking both sides of the road, Eamon na Sgaddan made his way homeward, but when he came to a house by the roadside, the house of Condy Heelagh, he stopped and went inside. Condy was the Meenaroodagh shoemaker and cobbler, a talkative man with a stoop due to long leaning over his last, a wife, Peggy Ribbig, and five daughters

grown up and unmarried. Peggy, a born matchmaker, though unsuccessful with her own brood as yet, was pleased when she saw Mr. Brogan enter, and more pleased when she saw him stagger from the doorway to the center of the floor. Peggy Ribbig, wise in her faculty, knew that a little drink often opens the gate to many possibilities.

"Mr. Heelagh, congratulations," said Eamon, when he entered. "Congratulations! Congratulations! I enter heir to the estates of my progenitors. And damsels fair, I salute thee," he said, fixing a benign and maudlin look on the five daughters of Peggy Ribbig. These girls had been sitting on the floor a moment before, busy with their knitting, but now, utterly self-conscious, with their domestic circle invaded by the collared scholar, they were doing up their blouses, dressing their hair and setting the odds and ends of the house in order. Condy Heelagh got to his feet, his pipe stuck in the corner of his cap, and gripped Mr. Brogan by the hand.

"Congratulations to yerself, dacent man," he said warmly. "It's not us that comes in for congratulations this tide, but yerself, Mr. Brogan, that's heir to the estate iv a dacent man, as the sayin' is, and we all wish ye luck in yer fortune. Peggy was saying to me but yesterday that if any man in the parish deserved the luck iv gettin' that holdin' it was yerself, Mr. Brogan. Didn't ye now, Peggy?"

"Indeed and I did that, Mr. Brogan," said the good woman, getting the hand which her husband had released and squeezing it tightly. Not alone did she squeeze it, but report has it that she raised it to her lips and kissed it. "And more than that," she added hastily, entering into the business which she saw was meet for the occasion the moment Eamon na Sgaddan entered the door, "I said that here ye were now, a man with land and stock and money to spare that would make a fine home for any woman in the land, no matter who she was. But the best woman you could get, Mr. Brogan, was one that would be able to do the work iv the house and keep it snug and tidy. That was what I said, wasn't it now, Condy?"

"Them were your words, Peggy," Condy corroborated, though feeling that his good wife was heading far too recklessly into the marriage question. "Them were your words, but how are ye at all, Mr. Brogan?" he inquired, looking at the visitor. "Ye haven't changed a bit since we saw ye here six months gone. And I suppose ye've been hard at work on yer business all the time since then, making yer fortune beyont the water. But a man with brains to get to the top all the time, and ye've got to the top at home and abroad, Mr. Brogan, and good luck to ye."

"Business first, Mr. Heelagh," said Eamon, dismissing the compliment with a wave of his hand and sitting down on the chair nearest him. He drew the full bottle from his pocket and held it between him and the lamp that hung from the roof beam, closed one eye and surveyed it with the other. "Business first and then pleasure," he added, holding the bottle at an oblique angle, opening the shut eye, then closing both. "Business first and pleasure afterwards. Have you a glass in your possession, Mr. Heelagh, so that we shall partake of a small modicum of beverage?"

A glass was procured, filled to the brim and emptied by Condy Heelagh. Wiping his lips he took his pipe from his cap, lit it and handed it to Eamon na Sgaddan.

"It's a big farm that ye've come into now, Mr. Brogan," said Condy when Eamon na Sgaddan got into the pull of the pipe and puffed the white smoke towards the ceiling. "And if there's not a woman to help you now, everything will go to rack and ruin. It takes a woman to look after the hens and ducks and feed the calves and milk the cows."

"Undoubtedly," said Eamon with a sigh, his thoughts taking a melancholy turn.

"True for ye, that it is," said Condy with an accompanying sigh. "And it's bad for a man to be left his lone with not a one to make his bit iv breakfast in the mornin' or to sew a button on his shirt or put a patch on his trousers (not that ye'd ever need to wear trousers with patches on them, Mr. Brogan), or try the ducks and hens

at night. It's a sin to be livin' and no woman in the house, Mr. Brogan."

"It is that, and for a man iv substance, too," said Peggy Ribbig, sorting her matronly hams on the hassog and taking up her knitting. "It's a woman ye'd make fine and soncy on it, Mr. Brogan, a man like yerself, that hasn't yer heart in the penny piece."

"And ye'll be havin' a drop of this, too," said Eamon, suddenly realizing that he had forgotten Peggy, and filling the glass again. "It's prime stuff, Mrs. Heelagh."

"That'll do, that'll do now," said Peggy, as Mr. Brogan filled the glass to the brim. "It'll be making me funny in me head if I drink all that."

She took the glass, sipped it, puckered her lips and made a wry face. This of course was a mere feminine formality, for she drank it to the final trickle.

"It's not often I get a sup," said Peggy. "But that!"

She spoke as one who, though not a judge of whisky, had still sufficient discrimination to realize that the glass filled by Mr. Brogan contained special properties.

"Aye!" said Condy Heelagh, with the air of a man who knows what whisky is but never tasted anything better than that which he had just drunk.

The five daughters looked at Condy, at Peggy Ribbig, then at Eamon, and then at one another. Finally the eyes of four rested on Biddy, who was the eldest, and on the face of Biddy shone a look of hope.

"Biddy, what are ye doin', not thinkin' about it?" said Peggy, looking at her eldest daughter. "Put the taypot on the fire, will ye, and give Mr. Brogan a drop iv tay to warm himself afore he's half froze with the cold wind that's coming in under the door."

"My thanks to you, Mrs. Heelagh, but it's not a modicum of tea I want to-night," said Eamon, putting the bottle back in his pocket and handing the pipe to Condy Heelagh. "I'll proceed homewards and slumber till dawn."

He rose unsteadily to his feet and went to the door. Standing there for a moment he looked back, his face twisting in an inane and tipsy grin.

"It's a poor house without a woman, Mrs. Heelagh," he hiccoughed. "But probably it's as bad when there's a surplus of the sex in residence."

The household laughed uneasily. Eamon was drunk and might say anything now. The shoemaker's daughters were all of marrying age, but were denied good looks.

"Watch yerself goin' home, anyway," said Condy in an effort to turn Eamon's thoughts in another direction. "Ye're passin' the house iv Cassie Shemus Meehal and she may come after ye with the stick."

"Not on my tracks, Mr. Heelagh," said Eamon pot-valiantly, shrugging his shoulders and taking the bottle from his pocket. He looked steadfastly at it for a moment, then put it back again. "Not with a stick, anyway," he said, as if that particular point was clear anyhow.

"He has a high opinion iv himself," whispered Biddy to her sisters. "It's funny the way that drink puts the notions into a man's head."

"Not with a stick," Eamon repeated. "If it's after me she comes, it won't be with a stick, I'll go bail. A stick! Not after me with a stick! A stick! A cudgel! A wand! But not after me that could buy her and her ould mother at any market. I'll go up to her very door and see what she'll say to me, the same Cassie Shemus Meehal!"

"I wouldn't like to be in yer shoes, Mr. Brogan," said Condy with a shrug of his shoulders. "She's a hussy, the same girl, I'm tellin' ye. There's nothin' that she's not up to. I've seen her set to mow a field, that one behind her house, and with hobeen and gibeen it's a job that few men would care to tackle. But my bould Maureen went for it and done it just like a man."

"It's not a woman that she is but a man," said Peggy Ribbig, drawing a snuffbox from her breast and putting the snuff to her nose.

"Well, let her be whatever she is, I'm going there to see her to-night," said Eamon, whose mood now took a reckless turn. "And not alone will go and see her, but I'll ask her to share me house and home with me."

The faces of the listeners lengthened. Peggy Ribbig

dropped her snuffbox to the floor, spilling the snuff. The girls looked at one another, and Hannah, the youngest and not the ugliest, tittered. Condy took the pipe from his mouth, spat in the bowl and pressed the wet ash in with his finger.

"A stick!" laughed Mr. Brogan, opening the door and edging out sideways. "A stick! A cudgel! A wand!" he repeated, when nothing of him could be seen save one shoulder.

He went out. An unsteady step could be heard in the darkness as Eamon made his way across the street, then a voice roared.

"Run after me! Not with a stick, a cudgel or a wand, anyway!"

"Poor Eamon," said Condy, looking at Peggy Ribbig. "It's drink in and senses out with him."

"The divil fly away with him and his capers!" said Peggy angrily. "I've spilt all me snuff. Come, Hannah, and pick it up, ye gawmy. Sittin' there laughin' like a plaisham!"

"I'm not laughin' like a plaisham, ma, and I'm not the only plaisham in the house if I am one, either," said the girl tartly.

"There's no one in the house as big a plaisham as ye are, Hannah," said Biddy, secretly annoyed at her own hopes of a moment before, and doubly annoyed because she knew that those hopes were no secret to her younger sisters.

Condy looked round at the girls, coughed and spat on the floor.

"Can ye not be quiet one minute, day or night?" he said angrily. "Ye are always going for one another like cats and dogs. Be quiet, won't yees, if ye've nothin' better to do."

The house was surprised at the father's remark. He was always a very meek man and never interfered in domestic matters.

"And if ye've nothin' better to do," he went on, wrinkles of quiet cunning marshaling themselves round his

eyes, "why doesn't one iv ye go out and see Eamon home across the brae? He's taken a drop too much, and maybe it's fallin' into a sheuch that he'll be in the dark."

"That's right," said Peggy Ribbig in a voice of approval. "Run away out, one iv ye, and see the dacent man home. Him after comin' back from foreign parts and left to himself to go across the braes in the dark after takin' a drop too much and it in his head!"

"Well, I'm not goin'," said Eveleen, the second daughter.

"Nor am I," said Anne, the third daughter.

"The poor plaisham," said the fourth daughter, Mary, contempt in her voice.

"Catch me goin' outside the door a night like this," said Hannah.

The field was clear for Biddy, the eldest and ugliest.

"Feeard, indeed," said Biddy, puckering up her nose and looking at Hannah. "I'm not feeard, but that and all I'm not goin' to see the old plaisham home because he's drunk."

"Ye're as feeard as the rest iv them," said the astute Peggy, who knew that Biddy, though indifferent to the terrors of the night, dreaded the jibes of her sisters. This doubt cast on the girl's pluck was a goad to urge her towards a certain course of action, and the mother's diplomacy was welcome to Biddy. She would now have an excuse to do what she desired. There was still hope.

"Just to show ye all that I'm not afeeard!" she said, taking a shawl from the peg behind the door and wrapping it round her shoulders. Then without another word she went out and followed Mr. Brogan.

VIII

The night was very dark, a mist lay on the holms and from the near hills came the rumbling sounds of water tumbling over the rocks. Here and there faint lights flickered timidly, now dying away and again bursting out with unwonted brilliancy.

"Micky Cosdhu's lamp and it always as if it is goin' out with the soot on the globe!" said Biddy mechanically as she ran, her bare feet pattering on the dry roadway. "Peadar Fasha's light through the old blind! Leggy O'Donnel's light and she so early in bed always. That's Eamon's talk I hear. He's speakin' to himself. Maybe it's lyin' down be the road that he is and goin' to sleep. It will be a death iv cold that he's gettin', the poor plaisham."

A motherly feeling was roused in the girl. She felt herself a protector of the kinless home from foreign parts. He should have some one to take care of him now, seeing that he had such a holding in his charge. Of course by "some one" Biddy Heelagh meant herself.

She found him sitting by the roadside, his head sunk down on his white dickie, his back thrust against a bank and his legs stretched out in front of him to their full extent.

"It it goin' to sleep here that ye are, Mr. Brogan?" Biddy asked, touching the man on the shoulder and nudging him gently.

"A stick, a cudgel or a wand!" mumbled Eamon na Sgaddan.

"It's cold for ye lyin' here all be yerself, Mr. Brogan," said Biddy. "Get up and come away home with me."

"Whose home? What home?" asked Eamon without opening his eyes. "Whose home and what home? . . . The estate of my progenitors. The ancestral halls and two hundred pounds her portion when the ring's on her finger. Mr. Heelagh. . . . A stick! A cudgel! or a wand!"

"Get up, Mr. Brogan," said Biddy, catching the man by both shoulders and firmly shaking him. He opened his eyes, rubbed them and looked at Biddy.

"Damsel fair, I salute thee," he said. "My heart is yours!"

"Get up, Mr. Brogan, will ye now," Biddy entreated. "It's yer death iv cold that ye'll get lyin' here on a night like this."

"I arise," said Mr. Brogan, getting to his feet and

clasping Biddy Heelagh's hand with both his own. "I arise, so lead the way and I follow thee, fair charmer."

What ensued is fully known in every specific item and particular detail to the Dungarrow folk down to this very day. Some youngsters, it appears, heard the voice of Mr. Brogan from the roadside, and these rascals, crawling through the fields and skirting the laneways on the heels of the pair, fair Biddy and the man whom she chaperoned, overheard their conversation and followed the developments of the evening with interest.

In the first place Biddy urged Eamon to come back with her to her own house where there was a good fire and where he could sleep in comfort through the night. Mr. Brogan assented, saying that it was an honor to follow in the footsteps of the fair and charming towards a haven of security. But when near the shoemaker's home he altered his mind and said that he really wanted to go back and proceed in state to the home of his progenitors. Biddy was loth to allow him to return to his home, which, though the house of his progenitors, had not been warmed by a fire since he left it on business six months ago. Eamon was, however, obdurate, and as token of his inflexibility of purpose he ceased calling Biddy his Fair and Charming. She dropped from her pedestal and became plain Miss Heelagh.

"In fact, Miss Heelagh, if I am not allowed to return to the home of my progenitors," he said querulously, "I'll lie down by the roadway and slumber there under the canopy of heaven."

"Give in to him, Biddy, ye plaisham ye, give in to him," came a whisper from the roadside at this juncture. "Give in to him, Biddy, and it will be for the best."

It was the voice of Peggy Ribbig, who was secretly following the developments of the evening.

Biddy gave in; the pair left the roadway and took their way along the boreen that led to Eamon's home. This lane was very narrow, so narrow that it was almost impossible for two to move abreast without touching arms. In fact, arms touched and interlocked and in this stage

of intimacy Biddy was no longer the Fair or the Charmer or Miss Heelagh. She had become "My darling," and "My wee love." When Peggy Ribbig, who despite her age had ears that could hear grass growing, heard Mr. Brogan address her daughter in such a manner, she turned back with the good news to her man Condy Heelagh, the cobbler.

It was at the turn of the lane, when Eamon saw a light through a window-blind, that the calamity occurred.

It was an ordinary, everyday calamity, which might overtake any man, be he a scholar or a plaisham. Some person has said, a Dungarrow man probably, that a slate may fall on any man's head. This implies that none is safe from the buffs of misfortune, accidental mishaps, untoward hardships, those wasps that sting human beings when they pluck a nosegay in a field of flowers. These checks and crosses wait man at every corner, infinitesimal in themselves probably, but bearing the seeds of incipient heartache. The Dungarrow folk are conscious of the truth of this, as witness their proverbs:

A thin rope breaks a giant's neck.

A lash in the eye blinds a sailor.

A doncy linch-pin takes heart from the biggest cart.

Mr. Brogan knew these sayings, and in after years when Fate, like a master that thrashes an idle scholar, lashed Eamon in a ditch, where counsel could not solace nor wisdom avail, he regretted the lesson he did not learn. Now, as he stood at the turn of the boreen, the wheel of his life swung on a fatal pivot, the blind that hung on the window of the house of Cassie Shemus Meehal. For a moment, with his arm round the waist of Biddy Heelagh, he looked at it. Then he released his grip.

"A stick, a cudgel, a wand," he muttered. "A stick, a cudgel and a wand! I must pay my compliments to Miss Meehal."

He crawled over an adjoining dyke, despite the efforts of Biddy to detain him.

"Farewell, darling, farewell!" he muttered, without turning round. "My Fate ordains it and I go!"

Biddy, in the desperation that defies Fate, followed him, clutched him by the sleeve, entreated him to come home, but all to no avail. He was going to pay his compliments to Miss Meehal, and his wishes were not to be gainsaid.

"Farewell, Miss Heelagh! Farewell!" he said with a grandiloquent gesture and thrust her gently aside. Then he made for the house of Cassie Meehal, and a moment later Biddy heard him knocking on the door.

"The dirty plaisham," groaned the girl. "Eamon na Sgaddan! Business man! A collar on his neck when he is here at home, and a red shirt with a graip on a dung-cart when he's beyont the water! May the seven curses iv the divil be after him all his life, the omadhaun! Him and his white collar and tie!"

So the young rascals who lay in the shadows of the laneway declared, which may be true. But the story which went up and down the parish of how she cried herself to sleep that night can hardly be vouched for. If she cried she would do so quietly, for Biddy was a very close girl, who did not wear her heart on her sleeve. If she cried quietly those who listened at the window that night would certainly not know the manner in which Biddy expressed the anguish of her soul.

And Mr. Brogan! Suffice to say that Eveleen Meehal, Cassie's mother, old and skinny and deaf, opened the door and let him in. Eveleen's daughter, Cassie, could be seen shaking his hand as he crossed the threshold. Then the door closed on Mr. Brogan, the only man who had entered that house since Shemus Meehal died two years before. Cassie had no use for men. She was a man herself if one can judge a human being by force of character and strength of body. It was said that she was as strong as a creel-rest. Whether this was so or not is a matter of doubt, but the woman before and after her marriage could carry a creel of turf which few full-grown men would care to shoulder. She would also take her place with the best of them at cutting a meadow or setting a ridge of potatoes.

But she was a very handsome girl and had more than one offer for her hand. These offers she refused in a

manner peculiarly her own. "Want to marry me, do ye?" she was known to say to a claimant. "It's a man that I'm wantin' when I take it into me head to marry," she added, "and not somethin' that ye can hang over a crook like a wet rag!"

But she did not chase Mr. Brogan away with a cudgel that night. In fact, he did not leave her house till the next morning. A week later there was a marriage in the parish church of Dungarrow. The happy pair were Mr. Brogan and Cassie Shemus Meehal.

FISHIN'

Now, who would ye be at the dark iv night
That comes to the door and raps that way,
And fright'nin' me be the fire me lone,
And him at his work on Gweebarra Bay,
Fishin'?

Him at his work and me in the house,
With a league iv water between us two—
Cold and black on me childre dead,
And drowned were the two iv them, Micky and Hugh,
Fishin'.

It's work for the two iv us; him at the turf
When the weather is warm, or else the kelp,
And it's knittin' for me when he bees out
At night on the sea with no one to help,
Fishin'.

'Twas yerself be the door, was it? All the time!
And there's fear in yer eyes and yer face is white—
Himself it is! Drowned! Oh! Mother iv God!
Look down upon me from above this night!
Fishin'.

CHAPTER II

Cassie Shemus Meehal

I

ALL-HALLOW'S EVE of the year in which Mr. Brogan married Cassie Shemus Meehal saw many events of note and import take place in the parish of Dungarrow. The year in itself was one of strange incidents and peculiar happenings, so remote from the ordinary tenor of things that many old people said it was a sign of the coming end of the world.

It was on the Candlemas Day of that year that Hudagh Nelly Wor died while letting ropes for the thatching of a neighbor's house. He was just winding the last rope round a cloo when he sat back in his chair and said: "It's the sickness that has got its hold on me. Run for the priest."

The boy with the trahook dropped it, ran to the priest and told him that the sickness was on Hudagh Nelly. The priest, an old man (he died a fortnight after this event) with white hair and a stoop in his back, got on his horse and arrived just in time to pour the Holy Oil on Hudagh before the old man passed away. His death was peaceful, his age a hundred and two, and despite his years the best letter of ropes, hay or straw, in the parish. The year in which Hudagh Nelly Wor died is even to this day fixed as a local date amongst the elderly people of the parish.

Six months following this occurrence another death took place in the parish, in the townland of Drimeeney, the rugous strip of country bordering the sea and an assembly-ground for burdock, bocken and byssus, the first occupying the level fields, the second sheltering in the lanes, and the

third spreading its silky filaments on the rocks of Gweenora Bay.

It was in this bay that death overtook Searlas Dhu O'Friel, the young man who once met Eamon na Sgaddan on the Derry boat. Full of tricks and capers, with folly in his feet and head, and an eye for the girls, his untimely end (he dropped from a coracle when fishing in Gweenora Bay) was considered in some measure meet for the boy. "We knew that he would come to a bad end," said the wiseacres. "We always said it and now lookit!"

Again this year had its Big Flood and Big Wind. The former was one of the most violent known in the parish. It rained for fifteen hours without ease or respite; the countryside became a lake, and as it was the harvest-time with trampcocks in the holms, stooks of corn on the stubble land and potatoes doing well on the braes, the flood was a calamity to the natives. Corn and hay was carried away in the river from Crinnan to Stranarachary, where it stuck in the eye of the village bridge. Here the water, impeded in its flow, rose to the street, flooding shops and houses, and causing great damage.

Neddy Tight Fist (every man has his nickname in Dungarrow) lost meal, flour and groceries to the extent of fifty pounds; the draper, Fergus Famine Guts, lost even more heavily, for the river rose so quickly that it was impossible to get bales of cloth, dainty articles of linen ware, shirts, petticoats, aprons, blouses and stockings out of the way of the waters before they topped counters and lower shelves and settled themselves in ground floor and basement. In the village twenty cows were drowned; pigs, sows and litters of suckers were carried away by the river. Even up towards Crinnan where the water ran from the hills the losses were severe. Sheep were washed away by the roaring brooks, cattle drowned, and crops on the braes carried away. For a fortnight afterwards on the river banks where the river Owenaruddagh made its way to the sea the stock and substance of the parish people and the people of Stranarachary could be seen rotting on the silty broughs.

Then when the river had sunk to its normal level came the Big Wind. It arose one night when the people had gone to bed. Their hay and corn, what remained, was drawn up to the high land safe from further incursions of the river. The cornfields were then all cut down and every farm had its lines of sheaves, rows of stooks, and fat-girthed, pompous stacks that gave testimony to the season's yield.

The wind rose suddenly, whirled down from the hills, overthrowing all the stooks, upending the cornstacks and trampcocks, playing havoc with the thatched homes, and stripping two out of every three clean to the rafters. The National School in the townland of Meenaroodagh was shed of its slates, trees were dragged root-clear from the ground, cans and buckets, creels and baskets were carried away by the storm, some of them lost for ever, and others, when found, not worth the trouble of picking up. Never was such a gale known in the parish, and the memory of it is fresh even to this very day.

On the morning following, Liam Logan found that all his hay, the result of three days' heavy mowing, was gone. Not a strand was left; the brae on which it had lain was as bare as the sole of a foot that leaves the wash-tub. Andy Boyle's house was set on fire and burned to the ground; his two cows, one newly calved and one coming, perishing in the flames.

"It is an ill wind that blows good for nobody," it is said, and even this wind justified the proverb. Teague Doherty, a man of money and owner of a well-stocked farm that lay in a little valley or pocket that ran down from the braes of Arlishmore, gained good from the wind, for the hay that was blown from the face of other farms had to fall somewhere, and most of it fell in the groin of Arlishmore and became the property of Teague Doherty.

Of course to people who do not live in Dungarrow these incidents are not of great concern. That a cow is drowned, a trampcock carried away by a flood, a house burned to the ground, that a man dies calmly at the age of five-score-

and-two or unshriven at the age of twenty-one, are not matters to excite much comment beyond the parish boundaries. Things of greater moment happen farther afield every hour of the day and seldom call for newspaper space. But in Dungarrow it is a different matter. Trifling things, such as those recorded here, make the life of the peasantry and even add spice to the drab routine of their daily lives.

A new blind on a window is even noticed in Dungarrow. One house had a red blind in the window, and without being removed it kept an honored position there for twenty-five years. When it wore a little and rents showed in the fabric it was sewn together. When a hole appeared, it was patched up with cloth of the same color, a strip from a bawna brockagh petticoat or a square from a woolen cross-over. There were three girls in the house, comely wenches, and when these grew up the boys of the place got into the habit of choosing the house as a place for a night's raking. A favorite trick of these young fellows was to slyly cut a little piece from the blind so that on the night following they would have a peephole to look in from the outside. The woman of the house on noticing the aperture always repaired the blind. It could go to rack and ruin seemingly for all that the young girls cared. In fact it was rumored that they themselves often lent a hand in the snipping of the fabric.

In the course of time two of the girls got married. They made good matches. One girl remained, the youngest, with her father and mother and the torn blind. One day she got a man who came and lived in her house and had the farm signed over to him. On the day after the wedding the blind was taken down and a new one substituted, this little repair in household decoration requiring as preliminaries three marriages and the signing over of a farm. The new blind was a white one. It took the dust easily and lasted for a mere eighteen months. This blind was taken down on the year of which we speak, the Year of the Big Flood, the Big Wind, the death of Hudagh Nelly Wor and Searlas Dhu O'Friel. But none of these is the

important event, the one which is to be spoken of in detail and without which this story would never be written.

II

It was the Eve of Hallowmass; with the boys of Dungarrow cutting cabbage-heads and throwing them against their neighbors' doors and the girls of the barony on the look-out for future husbands, for on Hall'eve night such a privilege is granted to young maidens, who perform various rites sanctified by ancient custom and proved infallible by modern experience.

Some went alone into darkened rooms, looked into mirrors and saw the reflection of a wraith, the fetch of a future husband looking over their shoulders. Others stuck knives into cornstacks, went round the heap seven times with their eyes shut and then found themselves assisted by a strange figure to pull out the knife. This figure was of course their man to be. Others threw cloos of yarn down into limekilns, holding one end of the thread in their hands. Then they drew the yarn out and at the end of it came their future husband.

But these were merely minor affairs save where the younger girls were concerned. And a few of the older, probably, if facts are to be given; for Leggy O'Donnel, who had a figure like a crooked nail and a rusty face, wrinkled and blood-threaded, was seen more than once standing on the lip of a limekiln unwinding her cloo, or doing the circuit of a corn-stack with a knife stuck haft-deep in the pile.

Nevertheless, the great events of the night were the dances, assemblies and arnals. The homes of the most close-fisted and near-going families were open that night, and all who came were welcome. Dungarrow from the top to bottom had scarcely a home that did not boast its full Hallowe'en table and open bottle. It was a night of merry-making and match-making, of drinking, quarreling and capers of the most hilarious kind. In the assemblies of the young dances were held, dreams of a year's standing

were recounted and interpretations sought for. Future events and contingencies were foretold by the aid of chiromancy, moles, cards, the color of hair, the cracking of nuts, the dripping of molten lead into water through the eye of a key.

It was also said that if a person went round the rath on the knowe behind Columb Keeran's house seven times contrary to the course of the sun a door would open in the knowe and he would be admitted into the Land of Tir Nan Og. This feat had to be performed alone, but nobody ever tried it. The young and frolicsome were frightened, the old and sedate would never be tempted to try such a childish diversion.

Now there were some among the inhabitants of Dungarrow who never took part in these Hall'eve customs, old people most of them, with the fun gone from their blood and their thoughts on the next world when not on the grope for the goods of this. Then there were some girls who had grown past marrying age, the white hairs of prim prudery appearing on their heads. Some men, too, bachelors creeping over middle age, had no liking for such entertainments, and on Hallowe'en these stayed in their homes and did not go out beyond the doorstep.

There was one woman who always stayed in her home on Hallowe'en night and that was Cassie, the wife of Eamon na Sgaddan. By virtue of marriage and beneficence of death (her mother had just died), she was the mistress of the best holding in the townland. Taking it hill and holm, meadow and moor, the farm covered some five-score acres, nine of which were first-class spadeland. She had money by, and her house was one of the most comfortable in the parish. So outside report had it, but poor Mr. Brogan knew otherwise. For him, the master, there was neither comfort, content nor happiness. Married, the two-month husband was kept in his place, for his wife, mighty of bone and muscle, domineering and overbearing, saw that he did whatever she ordered him to do. Even the neighbors, though not knowing the interior life of this household, felt that Eamon was not master. They called him

Cassie Shemus Meehal's man, but the woman was never known as Mr. Brogan's wife. To the Dungarrow folk this designation was altogether unconsonant. They would as soon think of speaking of the tail's dog or the horn's cow.

He was now sitting in his chair by the fireside, his black clay pipe in his mouth, his hat thrust well back on his head and his mind brooding dreamily on the days that were gone, of the time when he could go from house to house as he desired, sit awhile at any table and enter into the discussion and talk of the evening.

At the present moment the woman who had married him was out in the byre milking the cows, and when he listened he could hear the swish of milk in the gugeen. A cat sat by the fire washing its whiskers; the dog Copenhagen, under the bed, could be heard gnawing a bone.

There was the sound of a step outside and the woman of the house entered, her hair awry and falling down in strands from under the kerchief which she wore, her blouse open at the neck and her sleeves thrust up to the elbows. She placed the pail of milk which she carried on the ground, and with arm akimbo she fixed a stern look on her husband.

"Haven't done a hand's turn since I went out, I'll go bail," she said in a loud, strident voice. "Sitting there with one arm as long as the other and the whole house goin' to rack and ruin with nobody to do a hand's turn barrin' meself."

Eamon na Sgaddan sprang to his feet, lifted a besom from the floor and started brushing the ashes back from the hearth into the fireplace.

"And what are ye at, now!" said the woman. "Who wants ye to start foolin' about with the besom and fillin' the milk with ashes? That wasn't what I told ye to do, was it?"

"In the interests of hygiene," began Eamon, then stopped short as he saw the look of stern reproof which his wife fixed on him.

"How many times have I to tell ye to stop from talkin' them long words," she cried. "Ye were a fool and the

talk iv the parish before I had the bad luck to marry ye, and now ye are ten times worse. No wonder the people call ye a plaisham. I'm sick and tired iv ye; that's what I am, Eamon na Sgaddan. Look at the way ye look at me now, yer two eyes stickin' out iv yer head and yer mouth hangin' open like a dead fish!"

With these words Cassie went to the dresser, turned up a crock that lay top down on a shelf and brushed it over with a towel. Taking a strainer from the peg she emptied the milk through it into the crock, while Eamon put some turf on the fire, piling them up in a nice bulky heap against the back of the fireplace. Cassie placed the lid on the crock and turned to Eamon, fixing a stern look of disapproval on the man. When he had finished the job she came forward with a swoop as the hawk dips on its prey, caught the tongs and lifted off practically all the turf that Eamon had piled on.

"Now, for what were you putting all them on?" she asked, when she had undone her husband's job.

"To give some heat to the edifice, the house I mean," Eamon stammered.

The woman gave a grunt as if no words could really express what she thought of the man; then going to the peg in the wall she took down a striped shawl and tied it round her head.

"I'm goin' out," said she, in her usual stentorian tones, as if Eamon were in some way responsible for this exceptional move on her part. "So see and put on the pratees in an hour's time that we can have a bit a supper afore we go to bed."

"But where are ye goin'?" asked Eamon, for this was the first night since the marriage that his wife had shown any desire to leave her home.

"Ask no questions and ye'll hear no lies," said the woman. "But I might tell ye that it was Sally Rourke that came into the byre when I was strippin' the bastes and told me somethin' that I'd like to hear more about."

"Sally Rourke!" Eamon exclaimed. "Then it must be a stupendous matter since Sally Rourke came to speak

about it and not a word passing betwixt her and you for God knows how long. What was it at all?"

"What it was," said the woman tersely, and without another word she tightened the shawl round her shoulders and went outside. For a moment he could hear the clatter of her heavy boots on the street; then the sounds died away and Eamon na Sgaddan was left to himself, his empty house and his ruined fire.

"Well, it's a lot better to let her have her own way when she's like that," said Eamon na Sgaddan, priding himself on the forbearance which necessity demanded and common sense ordained. Cassie had married Eamon for his land and substance, not for himself. This she often told him, when lamenting the Fate that gave into her hand such an encumbrance as Eamon na Sgaddan with the hundred-acre farm of land.

"Just give her her own way and she'll cool," he said, lighting his pipe and remaking the fire. Then he placed the teapot on the hob, filled it with water and waited for it to boil.

"Just a little modicum of beverage before she comes back, and that will be some consolation," he said. "A collation of tea on Hall'eve night! And where is she proceeding to, now? It's the first time that she has left the abode since we were married. I wonder what she's up to? But I must be patient with her! Aye, I must be patient!"

III

At that moment Cassie was crossing the braes towards the roadway where a light gleamed from the window of Condy Heelagh's. For the past three years she had not entered the house of the cobbler, not since the time the cobbler's wife, Peggy Ribbig, had accused her of taking possession of some duck eggs which were found in a nest in the boundary ditch between the two farms. The nest was under a holly bush and the number of eggs which it contained was thirteen. Both claimed to have ducks which

laid out, and both claimed that the ducks which laid out deposited the eggs in this nest under the holly bush. Two might have come to an understanding, even two Dungarrow women, but at a critical period when the argument reached its height, a third party came in, also a claimant for these eggs.

This was the woman, Sally Rourke, who vowed that she saw the duck there every day, laying its egg, that the duck did not belong to either of the two original disputants, that it in fact belonged to herself, Sally Rourke. She allowed the eggs to remain there, for she knew that the duck would soon clock and bring out a fine ailian of ducklings. The matter, however, was very soon settled by Cassie Shemus Meehal.

"I've got the eggs," she said. "They are mine and they'll remain mine. Findin's keepin'."

Saying this, she turned her back on the two women and went home, the eggs in her apron. Since that day none of the three women had spoken to one another. But now—

But now something had occurred, something which was going to help a little towards the establishment of better feeling and greater fraternity amongst the people of Meenaroodagh. On one subject calling for counsel and consultation, they could come together, discuss it, pass verdicts on it, probe the why and wherefore of this strange occurrence, become critics and judges on the matter. It was a way that suddenly opened towards brotherly friendship and peace, an excuse for renewing old relations.

When the priest did the stations of the cross round the country, old quarrels were generally settled by the various families. But not so between the Meehals, the Heelaghs and the Rourkes. The stations instead of healing these old sores seemed to set a seal on eternal rancor. That the warring factions did not speak to one another for a year was in itself no sign of the eternity of their hate. Give them an opportunity and they might make friends. But when the stations came and passed and concord not established, it was a sign that relations were irrevocably severed. But now—

Cassie walked with a great swinging stride, her blouse open at the neck although the night was very cold. But the woman gave no heed to the weather. Her one thought was to take old Peggy Ribbig into a corner of the home and have a heart to heart talk with the ancient mother, despite the old feud, which even now was almost forgotten. Something more vital and more absorbing filled Cassie's mind. She could be big with Peggy now. Though the two of them had not spoken for such a long time, they would now hold converse and become friends. Cassie's whole being was filled with joy, and such was her exhilaration that on the last lap of the journey she ran like a hare towards the open door of the cobbler's home.

She went in without knocking, as is customary in Dungarrow. Old Peggy was sitting in the corner beside the kitchen bed knitting a stocking. At her feet a cat was lying asleep. The cobbler himself was not in, neither were the young girls, the three of them. Two had been recently married, Hannah and Mary, to men rich in stock and store, both natives of the townland of Meenarood, which was next but one to Meenaroodagh. The other girls were now probably out on their ceilidh at the house of some neighbor.

Peggy Ribbig put back the net which covered her white hair, allowing one tuft to fall down her brow, and rubbed her eyes as if they were playing her false when she caught sight of the visitor.

"Cassie Shemus Meehal!" she exclaimed, catching both hands of the visitor. "A hundred thousand welcomes to ye! Sit down be the fire and have a warm to yer shins. I'm glad to see you, Cassie! Glad to see ye."

"Thank ye, Peggy," said Cassie, and sat down. "It must be bitter lonely for ye in here all on yer own."

"It's that, Cassie, that, indeed!" said the old woman, taking a snuff-box from her breast, opening it and handing it to the visitor. "But what can one do and one old? Himself is down in the town getting a bag iv leather, and the girshas are out and at the dance up at Myles Doherty's. A big dance it is, surely, from what they tell me, and

lashin's iv potheen at it from the hills. And himself, how is he at all?" she inquired.

"Rightly," said Cassie Shemus Meehal, her thoughts running for a moment to Eamon na Sgaddan sitting at home by the fire. "A bit tired he is, for he has worked that hard the day up on the hills after the sheep and them running away everywhere."

"You'll make him work whether he wants to or not, the poor plaisham," thought Peggy Ribbig. "And didn't that gray heifer iv yours die with the muirill the other day?" she asked.

"Seven days, come the morrow, she died," said Cassie.

"And such a fine bit iv a baste, too," said Peggy sympathetically.

"Ay, indeed! A soncy promising animal and puttin' on beef all the time by our way iv thinkin'," said Cassie with a sigh for the result which belied a promise. "Now when did we get it?" she said in a low voice as if soliloquizing. "Wasn't it sometime about Candlemas last, the time the dance was in Neddy Og's? Wasn't there a dance in Neddy Og's last Candlemas night?"

"There was that, indeed," said Peggy. "All the girls in the house here were at it and most iv the boys were tight, too. They went on with it till the very screech iv dawn."

"And almost every one in the place was at it," said Cassie. "I could hear them singing all the night and not a wink iv sleep could I get at all, what with the girls coming home laughin' and the boys fighting about them on the road in the dark."

"That's boys, always, the vagabonds," said Peggy with a tolerant sniff. "They will gad about and have their fling with the blood warm in them and the legs supple."

"Some iv them were not very supple iv leg at Neddy Og's dance," said Cassie. "There was more'n one iv them that went under the table with what they'd taken. So I heard say at Mass next day. I was comin' up the road after the last Gospel, for what with the calves to put out

and the old brannat cow comin' and it fed on linseed three times a day I couldn't stay to the sermon. Who was it that was with me up the road I cannot call to mind now, but whoever it was was speakin' about the dance the night afore, and the drinkin' and the skiftin' and one thing and another."

"There never'll be a stop put to drinkin' and skiftin'," said Peggy Ribbig, pulling the greeshaugh from the heart of the fire with the tongs and placing the teapot on it. "It always was the way and always will be till the end."

"Don't be troublin' about making any tay for me, Peggy," said Cassie with a smile. "It was only just afore I came out that I had a drop iv tay. My heart's burned out iv me with the drinkin' iv tay hour in, hour out, all through the day."

"Just a wee deoch, and the night so cold and it Hall'-eve," Peggy cajoled, again taking the snuff-box from her breast and handing it to Cassie. "It won't be so long till it's ready and such a heat in under it. But it was a great night and all Candlemas last," she continued, "for I mind it well and it comin' near the morn with the noise and the whisperin' outside and the girls comin' in and laughin' to themselves and doin' it quiet so that me and himself wouldn't hear it and us two lyin' here and himself sleepin' and snorin' with all his might. He's one for the snorin', Condy Heelagh."

"And ye've no knowin' at all iv who was it that left the dance with Kathleen O'Malley that night, Peggy?" asked Cassie, speaking in a whisper, and looking over her shoulder as if afraid that some one was behind her listening.

"Well, I don't know who went home with her that night," Peggy replied, but so promptly that Cassie felt that the old woman did know. Peggy, although advanced in years, was a perfect store of local gossip. Always interested in her daughters' talk, she knew everything of the current events of the locality. "She's the girl for the boys, the same Kathleen O'Malley," said the old woman,

a certain asperity in her voice. "And it's with one boy or another that she always is, whenever she comes out to a dance or on her ceilidh."

"Well, she was like that at one time, I suppose," said Cassie, bending down her head till her lips almost touched Peggy's ears. "At one time, mind ye, but she'll not be goin' out with the boys again."

"Has the sickness got hold of her, then?" asked Peggy, sitting up on her hassock and looking at Cassie.

"Somethin' worse nor that," said Cassie, again looking over her shoulder.

"She's not dead, God rest her!" exclaimed Peggy.

"Worse nor that, even," said Cassie. "She's took to her bed, and Sally Rourke has gone up to see her. She's in the fashion."

Peggy gave a long-drawn "Ah" with a world of meaning in its depths, got to her feet, went to the door with slow, noiseless steps as if afraid of being overheard. She shut the door quietly, drew the bolt and came back noiselessly to her hassock. For a minute she remained seated, lost in thought, her expression solemn as that of a penitent before entering the confessional. She got to her feet again, glided to the tea-box on the hob, drew out three fingers of tea and placed it quietly on the water in the black delf teapot. Again she sank on the hassock, rested her elbows on her knees and looked at Cassie Shemus Meehal.

"Ah and indeed!" she whined, as if she had known from the beginning that this calamity might have occurred to Kathleen Malley if the girl was not very cautious.

"Indeed that!" said Cassie in a matter-of-fact voice as if surprised that such a calamity had not occurred before.

"But ye're sure iv it, are ye?" asked Peggy, a little disconcerted as the thought that the fact of to-morrow might disprove the statement of to-night crossed her mind. "Talk goes round and I've seen her the other day and it didn't look like it. And thin on it, too, she looked from my way iv thinkin', Cassie Shemus Meehal. 'Twas down to Mass she was goin', and a high head she carried."

"I'm sure iv it," said Cassie, shaking her head as if in condemnation of the woman who dared to look like other people when going to her devotions. " 'Twas Sally Rourke that came in to the byre and me gettin' the strippin's from the brannat cow! 'Glory to God! and is it yerself that I'm seein',' says I. 'Yerself Sally Rourke.' 'It's me,' says she, and then she told me where she was off to. And her comin' out iv her way, too, to let me know, for the journey would be shorter to the Malleys' from her house through Gubby Rattagh. And Sally short of wind, too, and gettin' stiff in the joints with rheumatics."

"And not so long since she had her last bad turn," Peggy Ribbig added.

"That's true," said Cassie. "But then she's a hardy woman and as supple as a two-year-old when she gets rid iv the pains. At Neddy Og's dance she was as ready as any iv the young ones to foot a six-hand reel or an Alaman and her comin' close on sixty or more. And maybe it was then and the boys filled with drink," Cassie continued, as if the dance at Neddy Og's had given her further ideas on the all-absorbing topic. "Now and I wonder who was it that went home with her that night. It's just nine months since then."

" 'Tis that," said the old woman, making tally of the months on the fingers of one hand and gazing solemnly at the finger which she did not need twice. "But was anybody goin' with her at the time? She was so concaity and full iv pride that it wasn't every one that she would let ravel her yarn."

With these words Peggy got to her feet, went to the door, opened it and looked out.

"I don't hear himself comin' up the road at all, as yet," she called to Cassie over her shoulder. "And there's a light in Malley's house, down in the room where the bed is," she went on. "And I can hear the fiddle goin' up at Myles Doherty's. They're having a night iv it. And there's a light in Connel Logan's house, too, with poor old Nancy in there all on her lone. Her boys are all out at the dancin', for I could hear them talkin' and

singin' when they went by here a couple iv hours gone."

Peggy came back to the fire, lifted the teapot and blew the ashes from the stroup. She placed it on a clean space of the hob and poured some milk and sugar into two earthenware bowls.

"They're more homely, these bowls," she said, handing one to Cassie. "Some ones is up to cups and saucers and what not, but for me it's always the bowl that can hold a good bellyful. Cups and saucers are right enough for them that likes them, but give me the bowl and I don't want nothin' iv these new-fangled quality poothers!"

So saying she poured the tea into the bowls and handed one to Cassie Shemus Meehal.

"And ould Nancy Logan is all on her lone in the house up there?" asked Cassie.

"She is that," said Peggy, swallowing in a mouthful of tea with one mighty gulp. "And poor soul, it's lonely for her all on her own be night with the boys out!"

IV

This feeling of hearty sympathy sounded strange to Cassie Shemus Meehal, who was well aware that Peggy Ribbig and Nancy Logan had not spoken a civil word for the past seven months. Relations had been strained between the two families, the Heelaghs and the Logans, over a matter of turf. The previous year was a very wet one, and few families managed to get all their peat dried. The Logans early at the cutting managed to lay a certain stock aside, but the Heelaghs, not so lucky, found themselves at the heel of harvest with the winter in front, without a dry clod of turf in their possession. A hearth without ashes is like a marriage-bed without a woman as they say in Dungarrow, so Condy, knowing this from many a hard winter's experience, did his best to keep a smoking chimney through the cold weather. The chimney smoked and the Logan's turf disappeared mysteriously. Nancy was wroth, and one day meeting Peggy Ribbig on the road she spoke about the loss of the turf.

"They're goin'," she said. "A creel one night and two creels another, and none iv the boys can tell who's takin' them. Ye yerself haven't any notion iv who's takin' them, Peggy Ribbig?"

"Oh, I know nothin' about them at all," said Peggy, shaking her head. "I'm never about to see what's happenin' to the property iv my neighbors."

"No, I suppose ye're not then," said Nancy warmly. "It's about the house ye'll be all day and sittin' be the fire knittin' stockin's and maybe makin' a drop iv tay on the greeshaugh, like a good, dacent woman."

There was something in Nancy's speech, in the emphasis placed on fire and greeshaugh, that annoyed Peggy Ribbig.

"Well, Nancy, if I make tay, it's my own tay and me after payin' hard money for it," said Peggy, aggressively, tilting against the latent imputation.

"And on yer own fire, too," said Nancy sweetly.

"If I was wantin' fire I wouldn't come to you beggin' for it, Nancy Logan," said Peggy sharply, fumbling at her cross-over with her fingers.

"No, ye wouldn't come beggin' for it, Peggy Ribbig," Nancy replied, her voice oily but ready to flare when a match was applied. "If ye came at all it wouldn't be beggin', I'll admit. Indeed, it's yerself that wouldn't come at all. But it might be some one else, and even him if he came wouldn't come beggin'. Give every dog fair play! That's me always, Peggy Ribbig."

"And me as well, Nancy Logan," etc., etc.

When the discussion came to an end the women went to their respective homes, vowing eternal vengeance on one another, Peggy on Nancy because "Nancy was a woman full as an egg iv bad spite, talkin' iv turf to ones with hardly a clod to burn;" Nancy on Peggy because the latter "had the consate to keep her head so high and her with no turf in her house bar what her man stole from his neighbors."

Nancy, however, despite her vagaries of temper, was a good-hearted woman, and when she came home and saw her son Liam sitting down in front of a good fire eating

his dinner, she thought of Peggy Ribbig in her cold house with nothing to warm her and her ones save stolen turf which the cobbler thieved in the night. "Liam," she said to the boy, "get yer creel on yer shoulders and fill it as full as ye can with turf and take it down to Condy Heelagh."

Liam did so, but when he entered Condy Heelagh's house Peggy looked at him with lips curled in an expression of disdain and her whole face dark with a look of sullen anger.

"Take it back to yer place," she said hotly, as Liam placed his creel on a chair.

"But it's so cold and the turf so bad," Liam remonstrated.

Peggy threw a crushing glance at the young man, shrugged her shoulders so that a stray tuft of hair which hung from the fringe of her net shook convulsively. A stray lock of hair seemed always out of bounds on Peggy's head, thus earning for her the nickname "Ribbig."[1]

"I would starve to the bone afore I'd warm meself be yer mother's charity," said Peggy. "Take the turf back to her and tell her that ye came to a house that's not held be beggars."

Liam lifted the creel, put it on his shoulders and departed. Since that day the two women, Peggy and Nancy, had not spoken a word to one another.

Now, however, Peggy was quite prepared to call on Nancy Logan. This surprised Cassie Shemus Meehal, but on recollecting her own haste to get into touch with Peggy when she heard the news her astonishment abated. Bearing report of such a startling event as the plight and mishap of Kathleen O'Malley was sufficient excuse for paying the visit.

"Indeed, and it's a friendly thing to go and see the poor woman on a night like this," said Cassie. "And it Hall'eve, too, and her all her lone."

"Then another sup iv tay, Cassie Shemus, and the two

[1] Ribbig: the tuft of wool left on a shorn sheep, used as a mark of identification.

iv us will go together and see poor Nancy," said Peggy Ribbig.

Together they went to Nancy Logan's, the two women conceiving for Nancy that ephemeral friendship born of scandal. Entering her home they were surprised to find the place crowded. It looked as if the Hall'eve merry-making was in full swing there, what with laughing, chattering and shaking of heads and hands. Nancy was sitting by the fire, a cloud over her head, her crossover a-glitter with needles and pins and looking like a diamond-beaded stole. She was talking in whispers to a neighbor woman, Maldy Kennedy, but when she raised her head and observed Peggy Ribbig and Cassie Shemus Meehal enter the door, she jumped to her feet and ran to meet them.

"Welcome, both iv ye," she said, catching the hands of both women in her own and shaking them as if trying to wrench them from the shoulders. "Welcome, both iv ye," then in the same breath, "and did ye hear about it?"

"Indeed aye, we've heard about it," said Peggy Ribbig, shaking her head.

"Aye, and I heard about it hours ago," said Cassie Shemus Meehal, a little perturbed because she was not the first to tell Nancy Logan the news, nevertheless seeking some consolation in the fact that she knew of it hours ago.

"Now, come the two iv yees and sit down be the fire here, with Maldy Kennedy and meself, till I make a drop iv tay for us all," said Nancy. "Everybody's heard about it, and they've all come in here just to have a talk. So sit down be the fire and have a shin-heat, and I'll put the tay-pot on the greeshaugh!"

The four women sat down by the fire, their heads together and the teapot resting on the ashes. They spoke in whispers, while the men, feeling that they were somehow in the way, stole out quietly. When they came to the road, they stopped, lit their pipes and with one accord fixed their eyes on the light that shone in the house of Kathleen O'Malley.

The men were old. Seldom of late had they left their

homes, for on their dry bones the winter cold was hard. But on this night an ancient instinct, the craving to know, to see and find out, had drawn them from their chimney-corners, these age-worn men, time-bitten, skin-dried and wrinkled, with toothless gums and drooling noses. When they spoke their thin voices squeaked from great depths like the gaggle of geese in a thick undergrowth.

"Aye, aye, indeed," said one, scratching his lichen-gray beard with the shank of his pipe. "Nothin' can help her now."

"God help her," said another, with a thick shade of pity crawling across his features. "But it's young blood. . . . And it's long since I put eyes on her," he sighed, as if for an opportunity lost.

"And will it be made right for her?" asked a third, holding the pipe with gnarled fingers to the slack lips that lacked power and purchase.

"Aye, and will it?" asked the others huskily.

"Not if the man's one iv some that I know," said Coy Fergus Beeragh, who happened to be one of the party. "I mind once, twenty-seven years ago the Christmas comin'——"

V

Back in the house vacated by these men, the teapot spluttered, and over it the heads nodded, tearing at the tit-bit of scandal as hooded crows scrape some festering carcass on the mountain side. Nancy, solicitous about the welfare of her uninvited guests, kept one eye on the teapot and two ears open to the conversation. Maldy Kennedy, shocked by the news, condemned the girl Kathleen; Cassie Shemus Meehal, grave-greedy, called for more, more, the occasion and the man; and Peggy Ribbig, astute in analysis, picked stray bones from the carcass, touched them, tasted them, smelt them in the hope that by flimsy clews she could trace an ascertained effect back to the antecedent cause which was at present wrapped in mystery.

"Now who could it be at all and when and where did it happen?" said Nancy, one eye on the teapot, the wrinkles of contemplation gathering on her brow.

"I'd give a lot to know," said Cassie Shemus Meehal, curiosity with its itch willing to pay any money for a salve.

"If we only could know somethin'!" said Peggy with the air of one who really desired to know a little, but was not quite prepared to pay for it.

"It's not often that things iv that like takes place in this parish," said Nancy. "And if it does it's not like it should be. It's gettin' into the ways iv places out and beyond it, that it is."

"True, true," said Maldy, shaking her head in condemnation of the parish that for once failed to garrison its virtues.

"There was that dance in Condy Og's last Candlemas night," said Peggy Ribbig, picking up a bone the possibilities of which she had already exhausted. "Nearly every one was there, and there's many a young vagabond goin' the rounds now that I wouldn't put it past."

"Neither would meself," said Nancy with an emphatic nod at the teapot. "Some iv them quiet ones!"

"The ones that ye'd think butter wouldn't melt in their mouth," said Maldy. "And more often than not they're the ones that cannot be trusted."

"That's a true word," said Cassie Shemus Meehal. "When Sally Rourke told me about it ye could knock me down flat with a feather, but that and all, I put the question to Sally and asked her if she had any idea at all iv who the man could be. That Sally couldn't say, but says she: 'I'll stake me word on it that it's one iv the quiet ones.' She took the words from me mouth, for that was what I thought meself as soon as I heard the news. Them quiet ones!"

"It's them that can't be trusted," said Peggy Ribbig. "I don't say all, mind ye, for it's manys a good, simple and modest man that's hereabouts, but some!"

"If it was in Drimeeney itself," said Maldy, implying that the parish would not fall into total disrepute if the affair took place in Drimeeney, the outcast townland.

"It isn't Drimeeney townland, that's certain," said Cassie, sitting upright as if a new light on the riddle had been suddenly vouchsafed her. "But if it isn't Drimeeney townland it may have been a Drimeeney man."

"Who?" asked three insatiate voices in unison.

"One that's dead," said Cassie.

"God rest him!" ejaculated three involuntary voices, and three pair of eyes looked in fright at the open door.

"A Drimeeney man!" said Cassie, as a fencer follows up a clever move and thrusts at a discomfited opponent. "A Drimeeney man, Searlas Dhu O'Friel!"

"But can it be him?" asked Peggy Ribbig, shaking an incredulous head. She was not a little annoyed that Cassie should have scored such a victory. "It may be true, but is it?"

"That's it. Is it?" said Nancy.

"It may be him more than any one," said Maldy. "But when you're not certain, you don't know and that's all about it."

"Well, I'd give a white sixpence to know who he is," said Nancy with a nod from which might be inferred that though she was not particularly interested in the man in the case she would still go as far as speculating a sixpence to ferret out this detail.

At eleven o'clock that night the old heads were still nodding round Nancy Logan's fire, speaking in whispers, and at that hour Kathleen O'Malley was delivered of a daughter.

THE WEE MAN

At night when I am sittin' in the corner iv the house,
And oh! so close and quiet that I couldn't scare a mouse,
It's mawmy up and looks at me and says: "It's now to bed
Or else 'twill be the Fellow with the Wee Red Head!"

And sure he's all for capers and up to any trick—
It's him that blows the rushlight out and wets the candle-wick,
And things that's worse than that he'll do if it's not me in bed.
I'm feared iv him, the Fellow with the Wee Red Head!

It's him that lets the down-drops in and salts the stirabout,
And him to shove the kitchen-door and give ye such a clout.
Some say the wind is doin' it, but don't I know instead
It always is the Fellow with the Wee Red Head!

There lives a man across the ditch. He's only skin and bone;
It's poor he looks, but that and all, he's money iv his own,
Bags iv it and crocks iv it, but my! afore he's dead
He'll lose it to the Fellow with the Wee Red Head!

It's comin' down the chimley brace when maw puts out the light,
And round the house and round the house he's goin' all the night—
It's me to get upon my knees and pray and then to bed
And not annoy the Fellow with the Wee Red Head!

CHAPTER III

Maureen O'Malley

I

MAUREEN O'MALLEY, the daughter of Kathleen, had reached the age of seventeen. She was a very handsome girl, well formed, of graceful carriage, and in nature sensitive and passionate. She was in no way like the run of ordinary colleens; on her there was a stamp of something distinctive, something that looked to horizons out and beyond the common run. Her face had something in it above the ordinary.

Her brow was open and white as milk; her eyebrows, strongly arched, gave her a certain commanding look modified by large, dark, tender eyes, frank and childish, telling of artless sincerity and innate purity of disposition. Her nose was straight, with sensitive nostrils that quivered when anything excited her. Her lips, full and red, opened to show two perfect rows of teeth and closed tightly when she was annoyed, showing determination that was not stubbornness and certainty of purpose that was not obstinacy. Her hair, not yet rolled into coils which tell of years, hung down over her shoulders, long wavy brown hair, a mystery of sheen and shade, glossy on the surface and dark in its depths. She was wonderfully beautiful, a spirit of grace and harmony.

No skillful sorting of dress, no affected arrangement of cloth or contour went to add to her charms. She was a child of nature, of the hills and the valleys. Maureen's was a terrible simplicity, fatal in its power, overpowering in its very artlessness.

At the chapel-gate on Sundays the young men of the

parish waited to see her come out from her devotions. When the old women saw this with their sidelong glance of suspicion they shook their heads and said: "She'll never come to a good end! She's like her mother, bold and forward!" The young girls looked on Maureen with envy. If she did not exist they might attract the attention which was bestowed on her. They spoke of her slightingly, maliciously. "Who is she, anyway, to hold her head as high?" they said. "But it's like one iv her sort to be like that."

She went to school when she was quite little and became one of the most apt pupils under the village schoolmaster. Her education was, of course, somewhat desultory. The master, Mick Gallagher, an old man, age-doaty, and rather indulgent, taught her very little, beyond arithmetic, reading and writing. These arts, the three R's, Maureen soon mastered; and having time to spare when her lessons were ended at the school, her natural perception and apprehension led her to books set apart for children of riper years. While in the third standard she knew the lessons of the older scholars, studying them with greater discrimination than did those for whom they were intended.

In fact, the girl, following the bent of her own mind, acquired knowledge far in advance of her years, and with a power of imagination and love of reading she read into cold print something which the writer probably felt but which even the village pedagogue hardly understood.

At twelve, she had read practically every book in the school, knew most of Moore's melodies by heart, and with a memory of uncommon tenacity stored with much ill-arranged and miscellaneous knowledge, she left school and went home to her mother.

Fond of her books at school, the craze for reading followed her to the home fireside where in the evenings she could be seen, her hair down over her brows, with a dog-eared volume in her hand, reading of fairies and ancient princesses who once lived in Ireland in the days that were when the country flowed with milk and honey, when warriors with long lances and swords of gold rode through

the dark passes, coming to rescue beautiful princesses imprisoned in the dark cooms of Sliav a Tuagh and the sea-drenched caves of Magherawor.

Stories such as these delighted the young girl. With her vivid imagination she pictured herself at times as the unhappy princess weeping for the troubles heaped upon her head and waiting for the knight to come and rescue her from her bondage. Or again she was Kitty the Ashy Pet, servant to a harsh mistress, waiting for the bonnie Bull of Norraway to come and carry her away on his horns to some grand castle where he would place her and then turn himself into the fairy prince that he really had been before the curse of a cruel witch changed him into a bull.

There was nothing to mar Maureen's delight as she sat at her mother's knee beside the hearth and read these tales with the wind whistling over the chimney-top and the sparks flying up against the soot, lighting the dark background just as her own fancies illumined the gloom of her existence.

On Sundays Maureen loved to wander into the spinney which clustered round the brook that ran by her door. Here, while other girls played tig or jackstones on the roadway, Maureen would clamber up over the rocks, tearing her clothes and her naked shins in the scramble, hearing the soft pitter-patter of the falling water, the restless movement of the swaying hazel-branches and the chirping and singing of the birds. Sounds with no apparent origin reached her ears when she stood still in a hazel nook or broom hollow: the chirping and twittering of insect life, the sharp squeal of a hidden stoat or the rustling movement of a scurrying rabbit in the undergrowth. As she listened she was filled with the sense of a dim, delicious awe, as at the presence of a world full of mystery which she did not understand and the secrets of which she could never fathom. Probably she would stay there all day, while her mother was down in the town, but at night, full of stories of great adventure, she would run to meet the tired woman.

"Oh, maw, I saw a rabbit the day and it looked out at

me from its hole with its two big eyes so feeard," Maureen would say. "And I climbed up a tree and looked into the nest of the cushy doo!"

"And every rag on yer body is torn off iv ye," the mother would say in a tone of gentle remonstrance, as she caught the little mite in her arms and lifted her from the ground. "Ye're the one for runnin' about all wild like no girsha else in the parish. Eileen Conroy never tears her clothes like you, Maureen. But come into the house and I'll make ye a drop iv tay. Ye'll be tired and hungry, me wee love iv all the world."

Eileen Conroy, to whom the mother referred, and who had been Maureen's friend since the beginning of things, was always neat and tidy. No accidents ever happened to Eileen's clothes; when they wore out, they wore out peaceably like a man or woman who lives to ripe years and falls asleep quietly at the end. She never had a rent or tear in her dress. It simply wore thin in places, and was patched. When fringe, flounce or frill showed the slightest trace of wear they were sewn neatly, tucked together, and at the end of a year her dress with its repair and renovation looked almost as good as new.

"She's a rare good girsha for managin'," said her mother many a time as she spoke to the neighbors of Eileen's merits. "Give her a needle and a bit of rag and she'll mend anything till it looks as good as new. The man that will have her when she grows up and thinks iv marryin' will never have his bottom out through his trousers. And the way she keeps her books," the mother would add. "At the heel of the year they're as good and new as the day she bought them."

But Maureen O'Malley's books never called for similar appreciation. At the end of a season they were always thumb-soiled and stained, dog's-eared and sooty, not fit in any way to compare with Eileen Conroy's satchel-ornaments. While Maureen read her books over and over until the mind retained every word that the soot of the smoky cabin had blotted out, Eileen Conroy's books, like precious stones, were objects of display at school and secret treasure

at home to be guarded like the gold of a miser. Eileen carried her books in her satchel, while Maureen O'Malley carried hers in her head.

But despite difference in disposition the two girls were great friends. Old Betty Conroy was averse to this companionship at the start, reminding Eileen times without number that "the girsha of her up there" (Kathleen O'Malley) "is not fit company for any children that has decent parents to look after them." But Eileen, who had a will of her own, vowed that if she were not allowed to speak to Maureen O'Malley just the same as to any other person she would not go to school.

"Well, whatever ye like," said the mother with a helpless gesture. "Go with that girl if ye like, but mind that I've warned ye against her."

Old Betty was a placid soul whose only method of correcting her one child was by warning her against an anticipated evil and hinting at the trouble which would await her if the advice was not followed.

But though Maureen had a friend in Eileen at school, the other children, even the youngest toddler, seemed to sense that Maureen possessed a characteristic peculiar to herself. There was a something, probably beyond the scope of their infantile discrimination as yet, which made a difference between themselves and her. Mothers at home told their children not to play with that Malley girl, that no good would come of it if they did.

"Maw," said Maureen one day when she came in from school and hung her satchel on the nail stuck in the wall near the door, "nobody wants to be big with me in the school. What's the reason?"

The mother's face fell.

"Musha! I don't know," she said in a trembling voice. "Do they say anything to ye at all?"

"It was the day that they made a ring round me," said the girl. "And them dancin' and shoutin' that I have no da."

"Ah! God have mercy on them, the divils!" said the mother angrily.

"But da's dead," said the girl. "He's dead, and I told them that."

"And what did they say then?" asked the mother.

"They said that it was a lie and them singing and laughing and makin' caurs at me all the time," said the little girl.

"Don't give any heed to what they say," said the mother. "Them children is up to all kinds iv capers, but it's for you to pass them by as if you don't see them, and they'll soon leave you your lone. Now sit down and have your dinner, for it's getting cold already."

But despite the words of the mother, Maureen, who was always searching out reasons for everything, kept thinking over the remarks made by the children at school, and these made her feel uneasy and shy. In the beginning reproach and obloquy needed the vehicle of words to carry them to the victim. These hints, sneers and stings amazed the girl. Why were they directed at her? She had never done anybody harm.

After a while the direct word was disbanded and in its place came the sly hint, the sidelong look, the meaning nudge, curl of the lip and raising of the eyebrow, and Maureen, growing in years and sensing the indignity of being the child of an unmarried mother, felt her position keenly. In fact, she never knew amusement or content now save when doing her lessons in her own home in company of her mother, or when herding cows on the brae-face in the company of Cathal Cassidy, a neighboring boy of her own years, or Eileen Conroy, her girl friend.

But now at the age of seventeen and long away from school she did no herding, for the simple reason that the stock of the farm had dwindled down until not one remained. The last was an old cow, saw-boned and lazy, out of which age had driven all instincts of roving and which could not cross a fence that rose higher than its hoof. This poor animal by a miracle gave milk of a kind belying the aspect of the pinched, puckered and rucked udder from the base of which projected four miserable

teats no bigger than warts. In her fifteenth year the animal that had mothered thirteen young, twins thrice, lay on the street in front of her byre and died.

When this happened and the house had no money to expend in restocking the byre, Kathleen O'Malley mortgaged her farm. The letting took place prior to the European war, and great difficulty was found in disposing of the place. However, Columb Ruagh Keeran, with an eye for land, came forward and got the farm for twenty pounds and stocked it with sheep and young cattle, year-old heifers and bullocks.

Then happened the war, carrying its effects, beneficent or otherwise, into every nook, corner and recess of the habitable world. Stock rose in price in Dungarrow, and Columb Ruagh Keeran found himself a prosperous man. Nine months after the outbreak of war, Kathleen O'Malley died.

II

It was a bright clear day, the cloudless sky seemed as if it had been newly cleaned for a momentous occasion, when Kathleen O'Malley was carried shoulder-high down the road from her own townland to the little graveyard of Stranarachary, the mourners following at rear. Immediately behind the coffin was Maureen, her head sunk down on her breast and her eyes fixed on the dry road as if seeking there for something which she had lost.

The parish priest, Father Dan, waited outside the door of the church. He was a tall, aged man, whose seventy years had done very little to hurt a great body or dim the sparkle of his clear eyes. He was a man beloved by his parishioners, a good priest and a worthy shepherd of his flock.

When the service in the church was at an end, the coffin was borne out and placed on the lip of the grave. From near at hand came the clink of money as the mourners deposited their offerings on the flat surface of a tombstone.

When the offerings were collected, and the names of those who paid called out, the priest came and stood beside the coffin.

"Say a prayer for her that is gone," said Father Dan, a stray ray of sunshine lighting his face as he spoke and giving him a venerable and saintly appearance. In fact, according to his parishioners' estimate, Father Dan was a saint already. "Say a prayer for her that's gone that she may be released from her sins. You are all listening to the clay falling on her coffin, but the dead woman doesn't hear that. She is now in front of the great Throne of God, standin' there in fear and trembling, waiting for the voice of the Maker of all. And just think of it, *cara yeelish,* think of it as if you yourselves were there and waitin' for ye knew not what, and a voice reached yer ears and that voice was carryin' a message to the Great God, interceding for yer soul. Prayer is mighty, it is the comfort of the weary-laden, the solace of the heavy-burdened, it is the pleading that will reach the heart of God. Pray when you are young, pray when you are old; pray for the living and particularly for the dead that they be released from their sins. One of us has gone to-day, another will go to-morrow or the day after. All of us will die sooner or later, and we'll die easy if we prepare for it now by prayer that is sincere, charity that's not high-handed and humility that is a pattern of the humility of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Prayer is, maybe, the greatest of all these, prayer that isn't a penance but an act of love and thanks to God. If ye don't feel like prayin' don't pray, for God won't listen to words when there's no heart behind them. Prayer of that kind is only a waste of time, no good at all, just like a job that ye don't put yer back into. If ye can't say a long prayer say a short one, and put yer back into it. Be like the birds iv heaven. When they sing they feel like a song and they make a good job of it. You'd never say that a lark, or a cushy doo, or a robin hasn't heart in it when they sing. They have. Then mean it. And God will pay more heed to the song of a bird than he'll pay to the prayer of people that sit by the back seat of the

chapel, yawning and wonderin' when the service will be over and finished. I've seen that even here in Dungarrow!

"And high-handed charity," he went on. "That's as bad as anything else and worse. It's everywhere, charity of that kind. It drops a guinea on the collection-plate in church with such a rattle that one would think that the chapel had fallen down, it gives the poor man a penny and a blow on the back of the neck to make him not forget it. It sees the sins of others, and prays for the sinners at times, but the prayer will be a proud one, a cold one, as much as to say: 'I'm a respectable person, and you should be glad that I go on my knees for your sake, and even God will pay more heed to me than to any one else!' Ah! *cara yeelish,* we want more humility. We're gettin' so proud, and even I meself am a sinner in this respect. God gave me strength and a good pair of strong legs to go anywhere, but I now and again get into a car and go along like a gentleman of money while all the time I am nobody bar the poor parish priest of Dungarrow.

"And I'm not the only sinner in the place. There are others. Purse-proud, conceited people who always are thinking about the number of their stock and about their holdings. After all, a very wee holdin' will do the best of them when they finish their scrapin' and savin', and layin' by of treasure that the rust and moth consume. Ah, *cara yeelish,* lay not store here in this earth, but in the heaven above in the courts iv Everlasting Glory, where we'll all meet one day when God sees fit to call us to him. Now, *cara yeelish,* down on yer knees and say a prayer, from the heart, mind you, for her that's gone and for ourselves and for all that's in the world. Mind ye, the Son of God will listen to Dungarrow from the graveside just in the same way as he listens to it from the chapel."

Homely tenets such as these, born of parable that had its root in local incident and custom, endeared Father Dan to the people. They felt that he was one of themselves and they were ready to do anything he desired. As one of themselves, a native of the parish, he knew his people.

III

In his youth, the youngest boy of a family of twelve, studious and with a leaning towards the clerical calling, he did not see the way to vocation clear until he was seventeen.

At that time all his elder brothers were away in other countries working at various jobs, and Dan McCabe was also on the way there with his bundle and reaping-hook on his shoulder when his opportunity came. Just after his departure from his father's house a letter arrived from America, and this letter contained fifty pounds with the behest to the father to throw Dan into college and make a priest of him. The father was overjoyed. It was his life-long dream to have a priest in the family.

Putting his letter in his pocket he saddled his horse and rode after his son, who now, tramping the road with four hours' start, was on the way to the Derry boat. When he overtook him, waving the letter as if it were a reprieve from the hangman's rope,

"Dan," he said, and the tears rolled from the father's cheeks, "throw yer hook and yer bundle into the sheuch and come back with me. Fifty pounds in this letter from the boys, God bless them! and they want ye to go into college. Corduroy's not for the clergy, Dan, neither is the hook. Throw yer bundle into the sheuch and up in the pillion at me back with ye and we'll go home together."

The two men went back on the horse, Dan carrying his hook and bundle until he met a poor woman to whom he handed them. She thanked the youngster with tears in her eyes, wished him Godspeed, the best of everything in this life and the next.

"And I wanted ye to throw them into the sheuch," said the father. "And if ye did what I said ye'd never get that blessing."

When Father McCabe was ordained he came back to his native parish and took up his work as a healer of souls. He was then a young man, fond of a gun on the moors and a fly in the streams, an ordinary young priest, a man who

could give a learned sermon in which he took pardonable pride, but which never reached the heart of his congregation.

It was in the summer of 1889, the zenith of the Land League troubles, and when feeling ran high through the country, that an incident occurred which had a great effect in altering the outlook of the man, in opening his eyes to a world in which he lived but did not see.

Father Dan was out on the moors one day with his gun, his gamebag full and his stomach empty. Regarding this condition of body the man was pleased. Hunger was such a sauce for the meal which his servant would have ready when he got back to his snug cottage. Shooting was a splendid pastime; it braced the body, livened the blood and strengthened the physical side of the man. Father Dan was a fine healthy animal, and though forty years old his age weighed lightly on his shoulders. Now, however, at five o'clock in the afternoon, having been wandering on the hills since nine in the morning, he felt very weary.

"It's time to get home," he said. "Nancy will be waitin' to give me supper. Ah! but what's that?"

It was a moorhen in a clump of heather that the priest sighted. Raising his gun to his shoulder he fired, missed the moorhen, but hit a sheep which was lying behind a clump of furze. The poor animal got to its feet, ran a few paces, staggered and dropped dead. Just at the same moment a man rose from the ground. After a day's hard work, this man, Phelim Donnely, was lying down resting on the heather. On hearing the shot he got to his feet and noticed that one of his sheep stock, a ram, had been shot by the priest. Furious with rage, the man rushed up and shook his fist in the priest's face.

"Is that all that ye've to do, Father Dan?" he yelled. "Gaddin' about and blowin' the brains out iv the stock iv dacent men. It's a shame and a disgrace—and the breed iv that ram too. One iv the best, the best in the parish!"

"But, my good man, don't take it so much to heart," said the priest coldly, for he was rather offended at being addressed in such a manner by one of the peasantry.

"Money will tide ye over this time and ye can get as good a sheep at the next fair."

" 'Twas a ram and not a sheep," Phelim corrected sullenly. "And another iv the same breed never carried its wool to a Dungarrow fair."

"Well, don't make a song about it," said the priest. "Tell me how much it's worth to ye and let me get home." With these words he put his hand in his pocket and rattled the change which it contained.

"Yes, rattle yer money and say it's all right," roared Phelim, who did not like Father Dan. "Rattle yer gold, that ye've taken from us in offerin's and stipends and plate-money! Some priests will do the best that they can for the poor people, like Father McFadden iv Gweedore, that's now in prison because he stood up for the poor. But nothin' iv that for yerself, Father Dan. It's the quality for ye, and the shootin' and the fishin' and all the people in the country starvin' with not a bite to put in their mouths maybe and yerself with the good fire when there's hardly a dry turf in the parish. An' now ye blow the head off iv me ram and . . . and ye should be shamed iv yerself. God forgive me for talkin' t'ye like this, Father Dan, but it's me ram and the only one I've got, bar two sheep, and the rent due and no sparin's come the next harvest fair. And herself in the bed at home with the sickness on her and a cough that's like the decline."

The words of the angry man cut the heart of the priest, and froze the very marrow of his being. Like Paul on the road to Damascus he had his vision and suddenly realized that the easy time, the soft bed and the full meals were not in keeping with his vocation, that he was a mean and vile parasite living on the sweat of the poor parishioners. He saw, as in a nightmare, Phelim's wife lying in her poor bed with the sickness on her and a cough that is like the decline, while here was he, a strong man, hale and healthy, roving through the hills cultivating an appetite for his dinner. The incongruity of his position, the shepherd feeding while the flock starved, struck him like a violent blow. He was judged and found wanting, and there

the Judge stood opposite him, Phelim Donnely, in rags and tatters, hatless and shoeless, vindicating a just censure and apologizing for it in the same breath.

Taking his gamebag from his shoulder the priest handed it to Phelim Donnely.

"Forgive me, Phelim, and take this bag with ye," he said impetuously. "Give your wife and weans a good meal. I'll come round and see you to-night before bedtime. I'll pay for the ram, and, Phelim Donnely," he added, "ye've done more for me this evening than ye know. Ye've made me see things, Phelim Donnely. Ye've taught yer priest his duty and from now on I'm going to see to it. . . . And this gun," he added, "take it. And maybe it's a rabbit or a hare that ye can shoot when ye're doin' nothin' else in the evenin'. And a rabbit or hare makes a fine meal for a sick person."

He handed the fowling-piece to Phelim, and without another word he walked down the hills toward his own home. Phelim, utterly aghast, stared after the priest, believing that the man had suddenly gone mad.

Then began a new life for the priest. He got to know his poor, went about the country always on foot, visiting the needy, and that meant every one, for the richest in his parish depended on the whim of a season and the temper of a sky. A wet spring on the bogland meant a fireless hearth in winter; a bad summer meant bad crops, ruin and starvation. From these hardships none was immune: not even the priest who now cultivated a garden of his own and with his own hands planted his potatoes and corn.

"Think iv yerself workin' like one iv us," said a peasant to him one day as Father Dan, with his sleeves thrust up and his shirt-collar unbuttoned, was setting a ridge of potatoes.

"Well, it's not every one that has the chance to learn a trade like the Carpenter of Nazareth," said the priest.

On another occasion when a woman, who met him coming in from the hill with a creel of turf, remarked that it was too heavy a load to put on his shoulders, the priest looked at her.

"Sally Rourke," he said with the slightest trace of humor kindling his eye, "there was once a Man who carried a heavier load to save the sinners of the world, not like me to keep Himself warm and comfortable when the journey comes to an end."

As he grew older and his hair became whiter, a look of sanctity developed on his face. The peasantry would not be surprised to come to Mass one Sunday and find a halo round his head, such as could be seen on the head of Saint Joseph over the sacristy-door. To all he was a saint, and they knew that when he died he would go straight up to heaven.

He counseled the erring, consoled the suffering, spoke words of cheer and faith to the weary. He would often rise early in the morning, don his heaviest boots and tramp miles across the hills to the most outlying habitations in his parish, to show the dwellers that their parish priest had not forgotten them.

"It's a poor house for yer Reverence to come into," the woman of the house would say as she wiped a chair with her apron and handed it to him. "It's like a byre."

"Indeed and it's not, good woman," he would reply. "But if it is, it's just the same sort of place that saw the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

He went out on these visits with his pockets filled with gingerbread and pennies. When he met little barefooted boys and girls he would give them from the stock in his pocket. As he grew older and became a little absent-minded, the youngsters preyed on his generosity. Sometimes on one journey he would meet a little rascal three times. This youngster on getting a penny at Meenarood would scoot across the braes and confront the old man again at Meenaroodagh. Here, the priest, forgetting that he had met the boy before, would give a second penny. In this way many a young profiteer took advantage of Father Dan's generosity.

Another stratagem in which the wily youth delighted was this: In the highly walled and strongly fenced garden adjoining his home a number of apple-trees grew.

The old man took great delight in his garden; in his spare time he pruned the trees, clipped the hedgerows and tended the flowers. When the apples ripened he gave them to the parishioners. Even this did not save the garden from the depredations of youthful malefactors. Long before the fruit ripened they came in the early mornings, crawled over the wall and stole the apples. Father Dan became aware of this and one morning he got up from his bed and stole quietly into the garden. Here he found every tree with its thief, every branch with its bag, into which the youngsters were piling the green, uneatable apples. For a moment he looked on, then one youngster saw him and with a shriek he dropped from the tree and ran to the wall and clambered over it. The others followed. Only one was left, a bare-legged, curly-headed boy who had climbed up too far and found it difficult to get down. He was terror-stricken at the sight of the white-haired priest. Father Dan was also scared lest the boy in his fright should jump to the ground and break his neck.

"Easy, my boy, easy," he called. "One branch at a time or ye'll tear all yer clothes, and what will yer mother say to ye when ye go home?"

The youngster reached the ground blubbering. Father Dan caught him by the hand.

"Now don't cry," he said. "Just wipe yer eyes and be a man. Which bag is yours? This one? Well, take it away home with ye, and the apples that are in it! Now ye're cryin' yet. What's wrong with you?"

"I'm feeard," blubbered the rascal.

"Well, here's a penny for ye," said the good-hearted priest. "And run away home. And I'll not tell yer mother on you. But tell the other boys that green apples are bad, that they're full of poison, and in addition to that tell them that whoever eats green apples will go to hell when they die."

This the boy told to his chums and showed them the penny which was his simply because he was last in the race. The children took the lesson to heart and for weeks following, Father Dan found many children on his apple-

trees, who crawled down weeping and vowed that they cried because they were afraid of him. So by subterfuge and stratagem such as this Father Dan was relieved of many of his pennies.

He was arbiter in disputes relating to land, march ditches, boundaries, trespass, right of way, letting of grazing-grounds, bog-rents, diversion of water-courses and rights of common property. The priest did everything; settled quarrels, brought the peasants' worries in front of the avaricious landlord, pleaded on their behalf, cleared the muddy waters where lawyers catch their best fish, gave judgment on this and that and was obeyed. His word was law in his parish. Between man and man he was an arbiter of peace, a bond of union and hope between man and God.

IV

The old, white-haired priest lifted the collection from the tombstone, wrapped it in a woolen muffler and put it in his pocket. Then he looked round at the assembled parishioners, at the two men filling in the newly made grave, at the women with frilled caps and white clouds who were kneeling here and there on the greensward, praying for relatives who lay below. Peggy Ribbig was there, barefooted and bent, telling the beads, holding them in one hand and drawing them through, one by one, with the thumb and forefinger of the other, looking for all the world as if she were breaking a crumb of bread and dropping it to an imaginary clutch of chickens. She was praying for her father and mother, both dead for close on thirty years. Now and then she bent lower to the ground, twisted her neck round ever so slightly and stole a surreptitious glance at the parish priest. "Just the same as myself," she thought. "And the two iv us will both be under the clay one day and not very long till that, God help us."

Probably Father Dan had similar thoughts himself, but being a good and worthy man gave himself very little trouble about the future. One day he would die, soon

probably, but why should he trouble about such a little matter as this? "It's all the same," he thought. "When God wills it we go, and not before. If we're wanted we'll be taken, and it's our duty to prepare always for that moment."

He waited at the gate till Maureen O'Malley, who knelt over the grave long after the others departed, came towards him, her head bent and the tears running from her eyes. When she reached the priest she stopped, her whole frame shaking with sobs. For a moment the old man looked at the girl, then he stretched out his hand and laid it on her shoulder.

"Now wipe yer eyes, dear child," he said with feeling. "There is nothing to weep for. This day to your mother is the greatest day of all. She is where we will all be one day. Fortified by the rites of the church, she died a good and holy death. You have your own life to think of now, and when you pray for the saint that's dead, remember to pray for yourself that your own end may be as peaceful, when it comes to the time, as your mother's was."

Maureen looked at him, taking her hands away from her eyes and uncovering her face. He could see her features swollen with weeping, the tears marking their course on the maiden's cheeks.

"I don't want to live any longer," she said in a voice of anguish, and covered her face again. "There's nothin' now for me, nothin' in all the wide world."

"There's much for ye yet," said Father Dan in a low, solemn tone. "You have your own young life in front iv you, and that's everything. Death will be, and people must go when they're called on. The day or the morrow and it's all the same. God calls us, Maureen my child, when the season comes. Pray for the dead and for yourself too, and God bless you, my child, God bless ye!"

The old man held his hand over the girl in benediction and a tear rolled from his eye. For a moment he stood thus, then dropping his arm he put his hand in his pocket and drew out the muffler in which the offerings were rolled. With the muffler he wiped his eyes.

"Yes, Maureen my child," he said, in a matter-of-fact voice which was apparently the preliminary to a question. "Yes, Maureen, and how are you off on it?"

"Poorly, father," said the girl.

"With not a penny?" interrogated the priest.

"Not a penny," Maureen replied.

"Now I'm goin' to ask you a couple iv questions, Maureen," said the priest. "The first is: what's your age?"

"Seventeen past," said the girl.

"And have you a boy at all?" he went on, interlocking his fingers and twirling his thumbs over the money-muffler which lay in the cup of his hands. His thick stick was stuck under his arm, and he fixed his grave eyes on the girl.

"No, father," said Maureen.

"Well, I suppose it's too early for that yet," said the old man. "And what do you intend to do with yourself now?"

"God knows," said Maureen, with a helpless down-throw of both hands. "Maybe it's beyont the mountains that I'll be goin'."

"Away from the parish?" asked the priest.

"I hate the parish," said the girl impetuously. "I want to get away from it and them that's in it."

"Away from us all?" said the old man.

"Yes, father," Maureen replied. "I've money to make to pay for the coffin and the bread and tea at the wake and other things as well. And I can't have it ever said that I let my mother die and me not paying what it took to bury her, God rest her."

"God rest her!" repeated the priest. "And you've in mind to sell the farm?"

"No, father," said the girl. "Maybe I'll come back again, but anyway I'll keep it, as 'twill be always something to put me in mind of her that's gone."

"Poor child," said the priest with a sigh. "Here," he went on, handing the muffler and its contents to the girl. "Take this and it will help you a little to make ends meet, and if you're of the same mind to go away the morrow,

let me have another talk with you and the two iv us will see what can be done."

"Thank ye, father, but I don't want it," said Maureen, thrusting back the money which the priest had offered her. "I've two strong hands, and I'll be able to work for my livin' beyont the mountains, and I'll be able, as well, to put money by. There's wages to be made over there now and the war on."

The man fixed a look on the girl, a grave, commanding glance quite out of keeping with the sympathy of a moment before.

"You know who I am and what I am, Maureen," he said. "You know that I'm yer parish priest, and God saw fit to place me over you and guide your feet in the way they should go. I've asked you to keep that trifle money and you've refused. It's for your own good that I'm doin' it. Now I order you to take it"—he shoved the muffler into her hand again—"and God bless you, Maureen O'Malley, and look over you all the days iv your life."

His voice broke and his lips quivered with emotion. He looked at her for a moment, then, waving his hand to the girl, bidding good-by, he walked away.

That evening Maureen O'Malley paid Paddy Keefe, the local grocer, for the bread, tea and sugar supplied for the wake, and Hughie Neddy Fury, the carpenter, for the coffin in which the dead was buried; and now fronting the world all on her own, she had nothing to aid her in the great struggle save her strong hands and the indomitable spirit with which Nature had filled her being.

V

It was the day following the funeral of her mother, and Maureen O'Malley was returning from the shop of Paddy Keefe, where she had been purchasing some provisions.

On the road she met Columb Ruagh Keeran, his coat off, his red shirt open at the neck. In his mouth he held a little clay pipe, the bowl empty and turned down. A bag which he carried on his back he placed down on the road

on meeting the girl. Something was moving inside it, a sucker probably, for the day was the one on which the monthly fair of Stranarachary was held, and Columb Ruagh, who had a potheen-distillery up on the hills, fed pigs on vat-sediment and the dregs of still singlings.

"Well, good day to ye, Maureen O'Malley," he said to the girl, fixing a sharp, penetrating look on her and spitting through his teeth on the ground. "I was just goin' up to see ye, but now that we meet here we can have a talk. It's about the bit iv business that me and yer mother had before she died, God rest her."

"About the mortgage?" Maureen inquired in a whisper, amazed that any one should talk to her of business so soon after her mother's death.

"That's it," said Columb Ruagh in a slow, quiet voice. "It's only a wee thing in itself, but the Lord knows when I'll be comin' down this way again and me with so much work to do up there be the Crinnan cross-roads and havin' no one at all to help me."

"That's true," Maureen assented sadly. "Me and yerself are just in the same boat almost. Not one iv us has anybody to help us."

"But I'm far worse off than yerself, Maureen," said Columb, with a condescending smirk. Convinced that all mankind was like himself not over-honest he always was on the look-out for the snare in a neighbor's action. "I'm an old man as it is," he said, "and I'll soon be past work, but as for yerself, Maureen, ye are a young girsha with the men on the run after ye, and it'll be soon that ye'll be gettin' a man to take care iv ye and set up a grand house with delf on the dresser and a taypot there and it full iv money."

"Well, it's not in me to be thinkin' iv gettin' married on a man as yet and my mother only buried yesterday," said the girl, wondering what Columb was driving at. Never was he known to speak kindly to anybody save when trying to get something to his own advantage.

"It was sorry that I was to hear about yer mother's death, God rest her, and I didn't know it till late last night

so that I had no time to come to the funeral," said the man, lying as Maureen knew. He did not come to the funeral simply because he grudged paying offerings. "It's for yer poor mother, God rest her, that I always had the highest notion. She was one iv the Glen people that I could trust above any one else, and, Maureen O'Malley, didn't I show it when I loaned her money on the land? Twenty gold pounds it was, and the farm, as ye know yerself, is not much security for that sum iv money. Twenty pounds in gold takes a lot iv scraping and saving when all is said and done."

"That's true," Maureen assented. "But with the war on and the stock goin' up in price, ye didn't stand to lose much, Columb Ruagh."

"Well, if I make a wee bit, and it is a wee bit, 'twas all chance from the start," said Columb, changing his unlighted pipe from one corner of the mouth to the other. "One never knows what is goin' to happen with stock. Maybe it's the staggers, the muirill, or the red water that they're goin' to take and then it's good-by to all that ye've spent on them."

Maureen fixed a pitiful glance on the man. What he was saying did not particularly interest her. A feeling of emptiness, apathy and indifference filled her breast. The keen edge of anguish had become blunt and she was now looking into a black void where nothing tangible existed, not a gleam of comfort or ray of hope. The man standing in front of her seemed to be clothed in a thick vapor; the bag on the ground became lost to view. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Now, don't be cryin'," said Columb, shrugging his shoulders. "People have to go when their time comes, and them that's left has to live and make the best of it. I knew yer mother, and a good woman she was, hard at a bargain. And mind ye I respected her for that. Always for me the person that drives a hard bargain, that won't take a baste without warranty or a butt iv butter without puttin' the auger through it. Them for me always, for I'm a man like that, Maureen O'Malley. But now that yer

mother is gone all the cryin' in the wide world won't take her back again, and them that's left have to fend for themselves. Now, Maureen O'Malley, what d'ye say to it?"

He took his pipe from his mouth, hit the empty bowl against his palm and put it back in his mouth again. Screwing down his eyebrows he fixed a calculating glance on the girl. Maureen, with feet bare, her toes half buried in the dust of the roadway, and her shawl wrapped tightly around her shoulders, sobbed with her bosom shaking and her whole body quivering with the violence of her anguish. She had no friend in all the world now, none. This one thought burned into her heart like a red-hot iron, sharp as a knife and as painful.

"Well, what d'ye say to it, Maureen O'Malley?" asked Columb again. "It's for yer own good, mind, so what do ye say to it?"

"To what?" asked the girl mechanically, then added in a tone of protest, "I don't know what to think about anything now, Columb Ruagh. Come the morrow or the day after, and maybe I'll be able to talk to ye."

"But, just a minute," said Columb coaxingly. "It's just a wee bit iv business between the two iv us. About the mortgage. Just listen. When yer mother, God rest her! went bare, twelve months ago, she came and told me that she wanted to mortgage her bit iv land. She asked so much and I offered her so much, a good tidy sum, and me a poor man. She took it, money down and the farm was mine till she could pay me back the good round sum that I gave her. Listen, Maureen. The farm is mine now. I've the good will iv it till I'm paid back what's owing me. Now ye can't pay back the money, Maureen O'Malley."

"That I cannot," said the girl.

"Then listen," said the man, beaming as if in anticipation of a good bargain. "It's a plan that I'll put afore ye, and ye'll be the gainer iv it and not me. The times are hard, no man in the place can be got to do a day's work for either love or money now. Ye, yerself, can't do the work iv the bit iv farm, Maureen, can ye?"

"No, Columb. I'm afeeard that I can't," said the girl with a sigh. "If I get the men to work I can't pay them afore the heel iv the year, and then maybe the crops will be bad."

"That's true," said Columb, in a tone sympathetically cruel. "The seasons may be bad, and then ye haven't the stock to put on and make a bit be the grazing. It's a farm for stock and not for crops. Pratees are no good on it, for they get the worms and the dry rot. So what are ye to do? Sell it?"

"That I won't," said the girl emphatically. "If I sell it I'll have nothin' left at all."

"And as it is there's not much left anyway," said the man hurriedly. "What would be the best thing for ye to do, Maureen O'Malley, would be to sell some iv the holdin', that corner up near me at the Crinnan cross-roads, and let the rest. Listen, Maureen,"—he took a step nearer to the girl—"there's one way and the best in the world that I'll put afore ye. I'll buy that piece iv waste land that's no good for anything bar the feedin' iv hares and moorhens, up be the Crinnan cross-roads. I'll give ye twenty gold pounds for it, the money that ye're owin' me for the loan that's on the farm down here. Then all is square and above-board. I keep that plot iv land and ye have yer farm free. I wouldn't do that for anybody else in the parish, Maureen. So now say the word, Maureen, and we'll call it a bargain." He spoke in a hurried whisper and looked round as if afraid that some one was listening.

"Then it's yers, Columb Ruagh," the girl blindly acquiesced, scarcely knowing what she said. "Ye can have it, for I don't see what's the use iv me keepin' it and it no good at all. I'm sick and tired iv the place, anyway. I'll maybe be goin' away on the twelfth to the hirin'-fair iv Strabane and get me hand in on a farm. The girls that's down at the butt iv the parish go way there every twelfth iv May and I may as well go as stay here, Columb Ruagh."

"Indeed, and ye could do worse," said the man, his

eye lighting up as if he saw another opportunity of profiting by the girl's helplessness. "Ye could do worse and far and away worse. There's many a snug openin' beyont the mountains now with the wages goin' up by leaps and bounds. Mark that, Maureen, goin' up and be leaps and bounds." He spoke slowly, watching the effects of his words on the girl's face. "By leaps and bounds," he went on. "And all found into the bargain and the hours short as well. All because iv the war abroad, too. It has done the country a power iv good, at least for them that's full iv stock. They can get any price for beasts now. And wages is well up beyont the mountains."

"So I've been told," said the girl.

"And told the truth," said Columb Ruagh. "Ye can get a power iv money over there now. But what will ye do with the farm when ye're away? Ye can't go on payin' the rent and let it go idle without a baste on it at all, not a baste iv yer own, but the baste iv the neighbors and them not payin' ye a penny piece for the feed iv the cattle."

"I'll let it maybe," said the girl with a sigh. She spoke mechanically, unable to see anything clearly. Of business dealing, the sale or letting of land, she knew nothing.

"If ye're goin' to do that, give me the first chance," said Columb in an eager voice. "I'll take the farm for a year from now and see to the fencing and the drainin' and everything about the place. But it won't pay me, I'm afraid, Maureen, it won't pay. But seein' that yer mother, God rest her, and me were such good friends, I'll take it and pay the rent that's owin', and at the end iv the year if there's any profit made out iv the business I'll not forget yerself, Maureen. Say that that's a bargain, Maureen. It's as much as any man and more than most men would do for ye, Maureen. It's a bargain, isn't it?"

She looked up at him, a smile, sad and grateful, showing in her tear-wet eyes. Columb looked at her, and something strange and novel suddenly permeated his being. What it was he could not determine, but for a moment the girl's look seemed to smother the man's business instinct. There was a moment's awkward silence.

"We'll call it a bargain, Columb Ruagh," said Maureen. "I'll be goin' to Strabane come the fair and maybe at the end of six months I will come back again, or maybe at the end iv a year. But I don't know," she added. "I hate this place and I don't want to set me feet in it again."

When he left her Columb pondered on his interview, recalling more than once the look which the girl fixed on him before accepting his offer for the farm. When he had covered five hundred yards of his journey, he placed his bag on the ground, and looked down the road at the girl on her way towards her lonely home. "Old Columb's a fool," he mumbled, as if reproving himself for something which he had done.

A little further along the road he placed his burden down again and looked back. In the distance he could see Maureen O'Malley making her way up the brae towards her home. Now and again she stopped and with head bent looked at the ground. As he watched her he could almost feel with his eyes the girl's soft cheeks and little hands.

"And the size iv her wee hands," he whispered to himself, as if these, though small, had made some great impression on his mind. Then as in a temper he lifted the bag which held the live thing and swung it over his shoulder with a jerk.

"Columb, ye're a fool!" he apostrophized himself. "Columb, ye're an old fool, but for all that as supple on yer legs as the best iv them yet!"

VI

It was the afternoon of the following day. Maureen sat under the sycamore tree that grew outside the door of her home, her head thrown back and resting on the tree trunk. In one hand she held a stocking, the heel turned and the needles stuck in the leg. That night she was going to finish the stocking, and on the same night she was going away from Dungarrow.

"For good!" she said. "Never will I set my feet here again."

She looked round her, at the rising hills and the fires of the peat-workers wafting their smoke into the air. The holms near the roadway were turning green and the river Owenaruddagh, running seawards, gleamed like a thread of silver amidst the green of the fields. A warm air pervaded the countryside, and the universal silence magnified the tranquillity of the scene. Not a soul moved. All the people seemed to slumber. Even the hills in their hazy atmosphere nodded drowsily. Cows, white, brown and speckled, stood still, lazily wagging their tails, others were lying down, probably asleep.

Maureen's soul was filled with strange thoughts, none standing out clearly, one driving another away in slow, gradual order. But under it all was a voiceless feeling of protest and resentment. Thoughts of wrong, burning like red-hot cinders in her mind, died out only to be succeeded by others, like sparks from the raddled rakings of a fire. She was filled with a sense of the injustice of things, the cruelty of her lot and the shadow which had always clouded her life.

She looked down at the houses, prim and proper in their brown thatch and limewashed raiments. There dwelt the good, honest people, the worthy and God-fearing, who had always shut their doors in her face. Farther along was the school, nicely slated with its rose-trees lined against the walls. Here Maureen had been educated and here she spent the most miserable years of her life.

Now it would all come to an end. She would leave the place, go away, for there was nothing further calling on her to remain. Her piece of land was let out on mortgage. This mortgage she was unable to pay off. In fact she had not got a penny piece in the world. She was penniless.

Of business she knew nothing. A helpless victim in the hands of any near-going neighbor, she was altogether at a loose end in practical matters. Although eager to go away and leave the parish, for good, as she vowed, she did not want to sell her farm. "It was my mother's and I don't want to lose it," she thought. But as to her purpose in keeping it she was quite vague.

In a dim way she fancied that even if she went away she had left something behind her to which she might return one day. It was a moment of thoughts without coherence, actions without motive; fragmentary ideas came and went in her mind like flocks of birds that career and toss against a black sky, form into ragged groups, twisting and scurrying, then vanishing, leaving nothing but the black sky and the breath of the storm which it threatens. And that darkness, that obscure void against which the birds careered was the future into which Maureen was looking.

A twig creaking near her woke the girl from her gloomy reverie. She looked round to see a young man crossing the near dyke, his shirt open in front, his cap thrust well back on his head and his face flushed and warm as if a hurried journey had added fresh color to a ruddy, healthy face. The newcomer was a tall, well-built youth of twenty with magnificent shoulders, brown hair that curled over his brow and fell almost to his gray, kindly eyes. These eyes spoke of something good, something trustworthy. In the whole expression there was an air of frankness and artless good nature. He was a boy whom one might trust at first sight, and one who did so would never regret the reliance that took the face for token.

Cathal Cassidy was, to all who knew him, the soul of probity and honor, whose word to those who knew him was warranty in any market. He was a hard worker with a hand in many undertakings; a fisherman when the herring-shoals came in to Gweenora Bay; a carter, who with pony and cart took the butter of the mountain people to market, their corn to the mills, their woolen webs to the cloth-markets where Donegal tweeds were sold to the buyers from far-off towns.

In this way Cathal Cassidy came to know his own corner of the world as few knew it. He traversed its mountains on the quest of straying sheep, fished in its crooked rivers, carted over its rugged mountainy roads, danced at its festivals and bought and sold at its fairs. Every fold of the ground, lift of a brae, dip of a glen, every hill, holm

and hollow of his own and neighboring baronies were known to him. He knew Tirconnail as a painter knows every color on his painting. "Cathal Cassidy, if he had blinkers on him and went through the length and breadth of the country, could tell every one townland by its smell," said the people.

Maureen O'Malley got to her feet as Cathal crossed the ditch, her lips quivering as if she wanted to utter some greeting to the man. She looked at him, then dropped her eyes and said nothing. For five days she had not seen Cathal, her friend. He had been away on business at the other side of Sliab League and when there had not heard of the death of Kathleen O'Malley. Now that he was back his mother told him of the sad happening, and without waiting for bit or sup he came to condole with the girl in her calamity.

He had seen her on the morning of his departure, a healthy, and as far as could be ascertained from outward appearance, a happy girl. Now she was changed. Her eyes were clouded, her lips drawn and her cheeks hollow. The anguish of pain showed in her eyes, lent its sad cast to the mobile lips and gave a tone of despair to her drooping shoulders. The gay laugh and careless gesture of a week ago were the girl's no longer.

"Good day to ye, Cathal Cassidy," she said in a scarcely audible voice.

"I just heard it," said the young man. "Heard it just a minute ago when I came back from behind Sliab League. Ah, poor Maureen, I'm sorry for ye."

He caught her hands as he spoke and pressed them in his own.

"One trouble after another," she sobbed. "I don't want to live any more and her gone, God rest her."

"God rest her," said Cathal, awed by the girl's grief. "And where did ye stop last night and the night afore, Maureen?" he asked.

"In yer Granny's," said the girl, choking with suppressed tears. "I was sittin' in the house and she came up and took me away with her. I went just like a baby.

I didn't know what I was doin'. 'Twas black night and day, Cathal Cassidy. But ones have to die, Cathal, haven't they? And she's in Heaven now."

"She's in Heaven," Cathal repeated. "And much better off than we are. She was a good woman, yer mother," he said fervently.

"The best in all the world," sobbed Maureen in inexpressible anguish. "Oh, what did I do, Cathal, that she'd be taken away from me like this?"

"It's the end for all iv us," said Cathal, knowing that he should say something, but feeling when he spoke that his words of consolation were futile and stupid. "Poor, poor Maureen."

She rubbed the tears from her eyes and looked up at the young man.

"I'm goin' away," she said shyly, as if telling him of something which she knew he would not approve.

"Away! Where?"

"To Strabane. To the hiring-fair," said the girl, her lips closing in a sort of passionate determination.

"To the hiring-fair. What for, Maureen?"

"I'm tired and sick iv being here," said the girl. " 'Twas bad enough with me mother livin' and now with no one at all to care there's nothin' to keep me."

"But, Maureen, ye can't have it in yer head to go and leave us all," said Cathal in a grave tone of voice. "I know more than one that'd be sorry if ye go, Maureen. I'd be sorry, Maureen, so sorry that I wouldn't know what I'd be doin' and me goin' from place to place through the country and coming back here maybe at night or in the early mornin' with not a light in yer home and thinkin' that ye were so far away and me not knowing what ye'd be doin'. But ye're not goin', Maureen, tell me that ye're not."

"I'm goin'," she said, "beyont the mountains to the hirin'-fair."

"No! Don't, Maureen," Cathal besought her, catching her hands and holding them between his own. "It's silly! It's mad, Maureen. The work that ye'll have to do there,

with no friends at all and gettin' up early in the morning and the hard word from dawn to dusk. Ye don't understand."

"Maybe I don't," said the girl. "But that and all, I'm going. I'm tired to death iv the place and them that's in it, all except yerself, Cathal, and Eileen Conroy. The way that people look at me, and me knowin' all the time that they're thinking bad about me, is enough to chase a strong man away let alone me. . . . Don't, Cathal Cassidy, there's a lot iv people lookin' out at ye havin' hold iv me be the hand like this."

"Well, let them look!" said Cathal, regaining the hand which Maureen had drawn away. "What do I care what they think!"

"But I do," said the girl. "They'll cast the bad eye on ye when they know that ye're comin' so close to me. When I was weer than I am now, they wouldn't let the other children play with me afraid that I'd do them some harm. Now that I'm big, they'll say worse."

"But listen," said Cathal, releasing her hands and fixing his eyes on the girl. "Listen, and don't have it in yer head to go away like this. Listen, Maureen, I don't want ye to go away. I want ye to stay here, and if ye're lonely up in this house, come down and stay with my mother. She has nothin' . . . She . . . Maureen, I'll tell ye what to do. I'll work yer farm for ye. I'll set the pratees and the corn and cut the hay. Only don't go away. If ye do ye'll niver know what'll take place there and ye so far from yer friends."

"I have no friends," said Maurcen with a bitter smile.

"But I'm yer friend," said Cathal. "I was yer friend always. Ye mind when the two iv us herded the cows and put the shilisthree boats on the brooks for the fairies and made whips and crosses from the green rushes. Ye mind it, Maureen?"

"I do, sure," said the girl. "Ye were always good and kind, Cathal, when ye were very wee and now too. Ye were always the same, Cathal, one iv the very best. I

could trust ye in everything always. I know ye're one iv the kindest hearts in all the world."

"But ye're goin'," he said in a voice of reproach, as if her good opinion of his moral qualities was some reason why she should not go. "Ye say this one minute and that the next. But what does it matter what ye say about goin' away? It's the death of yer mother, God rest her! that has upset ye. O Maureen! Maureen! Ye're a silly child." The young man hardly knew what he was saying.

The girl, despite her previous behest, reached out her hand and caught his, squeezed it tightly, her eyes filling with tears.

"Tell me, Cathal, how long would it take me to walk to Strabane?" she asked in a choking voice.

"How long! A good while," he answered. "Five miles to Dunkeeran, and seven miles from there to Greenanore . . . Kilgarrow . . . Drimaroor . . . Cloghan . . . Stranorlar. Forty miles. But ye're not thinkin' iv it, Maureen?"

"I'm going," she said in a steady voice. "I've made up me mind."

"But, Maureen, ye can't go," said Cathal frantically. "I won't let ye. My mother's away to the market. When she comes back I'll tell her to come up here and take ye back with her to our house. Then she'll speak to ye and show ye yer foolishness, Maureen. Just think iv it. Goin' away like this and ye've never been beyont Stranarachary in all yer life. Ye're silly, Maureen, silly as a wee wane iv two. Maureen, ye can't go!"

"There's nothin' for me to stay here for," said the girl. "Maybe I will come back again, and even if I don't there'll maybe be better times beyont the mountains. Nobody'll know me there and that's somethin'. It's everything, Cathal Cassidy." Her breast heaved convulsively. Almost unaware of what she was doing she placed one trembling hand on Cathal's arm and clung to him as an ivy clings to its support.

"Now go away and leave me, Cathal," she said with a sob, clutching his sleeve with nervous fingers. "You were

very good to me, but go away. Every one's lookin' out in the place and they'll be sayin' things. Good-by t'ye, Cathal. Good-by."

She pulled herself away with an effort, her head drooping and her loose tresses falling down over her shoulders. Filled with emotion which he could neither explain nor subdue the man took a step after her and placed his hand on her shoulder. A feeling of mastery took possession of him and something rose in his throat almost choking him.

"You can't go," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I'll not let ye go away like this."

"But I don't want to stay," said the girl, turning round slowly and looking at him. "Ye don't know me, Cathal. I've made up me mind and nothin' bar death 'ill prevent me. If I haven't a name iv me own I've a will iv me own and pride. I'm not goin' to stay here with every one's hand against me."

"But they're not against ye," said Cathal. "My granny would do the last thing in the world for ye and so would me mother. Ye know that yerself, Maureen."

"Maybe now they would, when I'm in misery iv me own," said the girl. "But after a week or two weeks they'd change. They can't help it, but they'd look on me as one that's not like other people. And I can't bear it, Cathal Cassidy."

"Do ye think that I'd be like the others, that I'd change?" asked the young man, with his hand still on the girl's shoulder, pressing it tightly as if he feared that she would suddenly run away and leave him.

"I know that ye'd always be the same to me, Cathal," she said. "You're so good and so kind and decent. But ye're not like the rest iv the people. If they were all like you. . . . But I'm goin'."

A look, haggard and feverish, overspread her face, as if something beyond her control urged her to take a step which she dreaded, but which she could not gainsay. She turned her eyes on Cathal; a moan of anguish escaped her as if she were in bodily pain. A pang of grief smote the

man, and a blind, insane feeling filled his being. Putting both arms round the girl he drew her to him in a mad embrace.

"Maureen, my little Maureen, my wee love, ye're not goin' away to leave me," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I want ye, Maureen, more than anything in the whole world. Ye're everything to me! Ye were everything to me! Not the day or yesterday but for a long while, Maureen. If I passed ye on the road without a word t'ye hardly, 'twas because I had such a notion iv ye. Many's a night when every one in the place was goin' to bed I watched the light in the house above thinkin' iv ye sittin' there under the lamp knittin' yer stockin' or maybe sayin' yer prayers. And then when the light would go out I would think iv ye goin' to bed and wonderin' what ye were thinkin' about. . . . Maureen, tell me what ye were thinkin' about when I was standin' by the road with my head full iv ye? Tell me what were ye thinkin' iv?"

"Iv yerself!" said the girl shyly.

"Iv me!" said the man. "And now ye're wantin' to go away and leave me. No, no. I won't let ye, Maureen! Going away to Strabane, indeed. What a wee, simple soul ye are, Maureen."

A flush showed in her face and she glanced down, afraid to look at Cathal. In an ecstasy of passion he rested his lips on her brown hair and kissed it.

The sleepy townland was awaking to life now. Every door had its eye, every window its sidelong look. Maureen suddenly became conscious of the interest evinced by the neighbors in the affair. She stepped back a pace, releasing herself from Cathal's embrace.

"They're all lookin' at ye, Cathal," she said. "Ye'll never hear the end iv this! I feel their eyes on us."

"Then let them go to hell," said the young man with an impetuous wave of his arm. "They're more curious about the business of others than they are about their own. But let them think," he went on. "Ye're not goin' and that's all that matters."

"I'm goin'," said the girl with the same decision that

marked her words a moment before. "I've took it into my head, and I'm goin'."

"Then ye don't care for me, Maureen," said the young man, a mad jealousy flaming up in his heart. "That's why ye're goin' away, because ye don't care for me."

"I'm goin' away because I do care for ye," said the girl. "I've always cared for ye, Cathal."

"And ye're goin' to leave me?" he asked, with an incredulous nod of his head. "That's a kind iv love that I don't know what to make iv, Maureen O'Malley. Ye tell me that ye care for me and then get out iv the way as if ye were afraid iv me. But it's only fun iv me that ye're makin', Maureen. Ye're not goin' away."

"I'm goin'," said the girl. "If I stay here it will be the black look and the hard word for me as long as I live. And if ye take the notion iv helpin' me into yer head it will be the same for yerself. And ye'll be sorry for it, not maybe now, but in after years."

"Not me," said Cathal, setting his teeth and closing his fists as if threatening those who dared to molest the girl by word or look. "If they'd only dare."

"They'd dare," said the girl. "Not maybe to yer face, but behind yer back. Ye don't know the people. Ye weren't me or me mother, God rest her. And when ye would marry me, as ye would, I know, for ye're not like the fellows about the place. Ye're good and kind and never a man that would put a girl to shame. I speak like this because I'm wise beyond my years maybe," she hastened to add, seeing a crimson blush rise on Cathal's face. "Ye learn a lot through sorrow; and it's much that me mother, God rest her! told me that's known to nobody beyond me and herself. And nobody only meself knows the woman that she was, so good and so kind. And it wasn't her to blame any one at all for what happened. ' 'Twas all me fault,' she said. But beyond that she would tell me nothin'. 'God knows,' she used to say, 'and meself and another,' but who the other was she never told me, and I never asked her. She didn't want to put him to shame, whoever he was. And I'm like her, Cathal.

I don't want to put anybody to shame, neither for a fault that's their own or for a fault that's not their own. I could never marry yerself, Cathal. We'd be sorry for it ever after, the two iv us, if I took yer name."

"I wouldn't be sorry," said the young man. "As if I would and not a girl in the whole world like ye, Maureen. What would I care what people would say. Ah!" he exclaimed passionately. "If I would hear them sayin' anything against ye, Maureen, I'd let them know." He thrust out his fist as if striking somebody—"And sorry! Oh, Maureen!"

"Iv course I know that ye'd never let on to me, even if ye were," said the girl. "But I'd be thinkin' this and that and I'd never have a minute's happiness. Good-by to ye, Cathal."

She caught his hand again, squeezed it, and her eyes, laden with tears, rested on the man's face. Then without another word she dropped his hand, turned round and walked slowly back to her home. His eyes followed her to the door; he saw her stand for a moment on the threshold, her head bowed, the uncoiled tresses of hair resting on her shoulders. Without looking back she disappeared into the house.

For a full five minutes Cathal stood there as if frozen, his eyes fixed on the house, a look of perplexity and agitation featuring his face. Suddenly his eyes cleared and a hopeful glow suffused his countenance.

"I know," he exclaimed happily. "I'll get me mother to come up and she'll bring Maureen to her senses."

Then he went back to his home.

VII

Darkness was settling. Sliab a Tuagh, with its nightcap on, was falling asleep in its blanket of gloom. Over its head the early stars were being joined by others that suddenly flared into sight against the obscurity as glowworms appear in the loom of a bog. Over the country the varied sounds of falling night were making themselves

manifest, the lowing of heavy-uddered cows that yearned for the hand of the milker, the quacking of late ducks as they made for their croaghs, the barking of dogs, the sound of voices, the laughter of the young who, having finished their day's work, were now congregating in groups here and there on the roadway, some talking of the work of the day, others of love, of this and that, all the insignificant little things, the mere nothings, which go to make the life of the young.

It was at this hour that a light suddenly shone from the window of Maureen O'Malley's house on the Meenaroodagh brae. The lamp had been lit by the hapless girl, who, having wakened from a troubled slumber into which she had fallen some moments before, recollected the journey which lay before her. Even to herself she would assign no reason for starting on her journey that night. To-morrow at dawn would do as well. The fair would be held the day after to-morrow. Why was she going there? What had happened? She hardly knew. Her eyes heavy with sleep and their lashes beaded with tears caught the light of the newly-lighted lamp and glimmered with a million little suns. A weariness lay like a cold, heavy stone on her breast, depriving her of the very power of thought. She rubbed her eyes, turned up the wick a little, then turned it down again as she saw the flame casting a layer of soot on the top of the globe. All this she did mechanically as in a dream.

She looked round the kitchen. It was dark and quiet save within the circle lit by the lamp. On the top of the dresser near the rafters lay a white cat asleep, its body curled up in a nice round ball. Shadows played on the wall, moving slowly and lazily as if afraid. Every object in the room, tables, chairs, the delf on the dresser, the upended crock leaning against the wall, the dying fire with the ash crumbling from the peat and dropping silently on the hearth, inspired awe and quiet. A feeling of loneliness subdued the girl.

She looked at the empty stool under the brace. This was where her mother used to sit and knit her stockings.

She wasn't there now, and Maureen, so long accustomed to her presence in the one spot, the click and sparkle of the needles, was not surprised when she saw the dead suddenly appear and take up her place on the hassock again. Conscious that the dead was really there as of old, Maureen was not surprised to find the Presence take on form, lift her needles and go on with the knitting. At that moment a slight rustle from the doorway engaged the girl's attention. She turned round.

Some one was standing there, framed in the dark background and looking at Maureen. The newcomer was a young girl about Maureen's age, barefooted, with a shawl round her shoulders. With lips slightly parted, cheeks flushed and eyes downcast as if suffering from timidity and embarrassment, the newcomer rested her eyes on the floor, then raised them and looked at Maureen.

"Eileen Conroy! Is it yerself?"

"I knew ye'd be alone," said the visitor. "And it's so dark and lone here and no one at all to speak one word to ye. My mother wonders what's wrong with ye at all and everybody in the place ready to do the last thing in the world for ye and ye won't come out and stay with anybody at all. Stayin' here all be yerself, Maureen! It's a wonder ye're not feeard!"

"There's nothin' to be feeard iv here," said Maureen in a low voice, looking at the hassock to find that the apparition had vanished.

"But ye used to be feeard," said Eileen in a puzzled voice. "Once, and that not so long gone, ye wouldn't go out to the well be night for a bucket iv water, unless yer mother would stand at the door singin' all the time till ye came back again. Now, ye're all yer lone and ye stay here."

"But I'm not all me lone," said Maureen with a wan smile. "I sit here and know I'm safe, for me mother's watchin' over me yet. I saw her a minit ago and me sittin' here be the fire. She looked at me, just in the same way as she always used to do—"

"Mother iv God!" Eileen exclaimed, making the sign

of the Cross, her whole body trembling. She was still standing at the door.

"I looked at her," Maureen continued, her voice sinking to a whisper, "and I saw her sit down on the hassog and grope on the floor just the same as she used to do when she had lost a needle, and it maybe fell into the ashes. There wasn't a bit iv fear in me, for why should there be, for wasn't she my own mother? She kept gropin' and gropin' and two or three times she put her hand on a hot coal and kept it there as if the very feelin' was no longer in her. All at once she lifted her head and set eyes on me. It didn't look as if she had seen me before. She looked as if she wanted to say something and her so lone like and full iv sorrow that my heart grew cold as ice in my breast. Then I hears yerself comin' in, and with that she went out iv my sight like a spark in the air and I was left on my lone again."

"God help us the day and the night," said Eileen, fixing a scared look on the hassock by the fire and crossing herself. "But maybe it was only a dream ye were havin'."

"Maybe that," Maureen replied in a low, resigned tone. "But that's what I saw anyway, Eileen. And the way she groped for the needle, just the same as always. And she had the same sprikkled cloud on her and her maarteens and her checked wool petticoat. And it'll be hauntin' the house now she'll be till I get Masses said for her soul."

Eileen was silent. She had now come up to the fireplace, and, sitting on a chair, she cast furtive glances round the room. A troubled expression settled in her eyes, and it seemed, even to Maureen, that her friend had something on her mind. They looked at one another.

"Ye're not yerself, Eileen," said Maureen suddenly. "Ye're as white as a sheet. It's nothin' wrong with ye, is it?"

"Nothin'," said Eileen gloomily. "But I'm sick iv this place. I wished I was out iv it. Ye can't move for it's work all day and most iv the night. Maybe a dance once a month and ye never see anything at all. I have a good mind to go away altogether. If it wasn't for me

mother and her so old with the rheumatics, I'd be away years ago."

"Every one's gettin' the idea iv goin' away into their heads now," said Maureen. "There'll soon be not a one left in the parish."

"Who's leavin' now?" asked Eileen.

"Oh, well, every one nearly," said Maureen. "There's so many that's gone away to the war and maybe never comin' back; and so many more that are goin' when they see that England does the right thing to Ireland."

"But what do they mean by the right thing at all?" Eileen questioned. Hers was a practical nature in relation to immediate desires, the cooking of a meal, the knitting of a stocking, the mending of a torn dress, but for anything out and beyond her sphere of domestic activities, she had no use. "I don't know what they're always speakin' about, the boys that bees round. It's always Ireland doin' this and that if England does the right thing."

"It's a long story," said Maureen, looking up. "Ireland hasn't her rights. They were taken from her hundreds of years ago by England, and ever since that time she has been crushed down. They've taken everything from her, everything that by right belongs to a nation. Her language is almost gone, and she hasn't a tongue iv her own anywhere bar in wild, out-of-the-way places like this, and even here it's dyin' out. We go to school as children and everything is told to us in the tongue iv the Sassenach. We learn our prayers in English, our catechism in English, our lessons in English. If the boys go out to fight as soldiers they have got to wear the clothes of the King of England. They'll fight be the side iv France if they're allowed to, but England won't allow them."

"But my mother says that there never was a time for Ireland like the times that's in it now," said Eileen. "Stock goin' up in price and the Old Age Pensions. And then the boys that have gone away, it's money in pocket for them that's at home. Hannah McKelvie iv the Hill has two iv her boys, Corney and Hugh, at the war, and it's piles iv money that she can lift on them at the Post Office once

a week. And neither one or other iv them was much good to man or baste when they were here at home."

"That's it," said Maureen with a sigh. "If a thing gets in money it doesn't matter at all what the thing is. Nobody is much good that will go to fight and his thought on nothin' but the money that it will get him. Freedom is not to be got in that way. But, Eileen," she added hastily with a timorous smile, "it's not for me to be talkin' iv things like this unless it's to take me mind off iv other things and me that should be gettin' ready for me journey. Forty miles it is, and the fair is the day after the morrow."

"Ye're a funny one, Maureen," said the other girl, who had already heard of Maureen's project. "But I won't think that ye're goin' at all. It's not to be thought iv, and ye leavin' so much."

She shook her head sadly, as if lamenting something which she herself had lost. She gazed furtively at Maureen as if trying to read something in the girl's expression, something of great import and moment to herself. Several times Maureen looked up to meet this glance. It disconcerted her. She sensed a certain tension in the glance, and the atmosphere of the room seemed to fill with certain antipathy which emanated from the visitor.

She had known Eileen ever since she could remember; knew, as she thought, every mood of the girl, and could with the utmost ease couple any act of the girl with the motive and any mood with the occasion. But this stealthy glance, this covert look which hid some ulterior design was not usual to Eileen.

"Ye're lookin' very funny the night," said Maureen suddenly.

"In what way," stammered the girl, catching her breath as if on the point of sobbing.

"Well, it's the way that ye're lookin' at me," said Maureen. "Ye don't seem yerself at all."

"Then I'm not," the girl avowed. "I'm not meself at all. It's—Oh, Maureen, I couldn't tell ye for worlds, not to ye anyway."

"Then who to, if not meself?" said Maureen, putting both arms round her friend's shoulders and drawing her closer to herself. "If I can do anything to help ye, Eileen, I'll do it. Ye're the only girl friend that I've got in the whole world, and who could look for another friend when they have yerself, Eileen? Now tell me what's wrong with ye, Eileen. Mind that I'm yer friend, and ye're my friend, the best friend I've in the world."

"Bar one," said Eileen. "And that is everything, everything." As she spoke she got to her feet, stepped back a few paces and coming in contact with the chair under the window, sat down, as if suddenly losing all control of herself. A blush mantled her face, rising to the eyes, getting into tone with the lids that were reddened as if with tears.

"Bar one," Maureen repeated in a surprised voice. "What d'ye mane at all, Eileen Conroy?"

"Ye know yerself, Maureen."

"Me! I don't know! It's the want iv sleep the nights iv the wake that's tellin' on ye."

"I wished it was," said the girl, again rising to her feet and taking a step towards the door. "I'm goin' home," she said, but then as if thinking better of it she sat down again.

"What's wrong with ye at all?" asked Maureen, fixing a puzzled look on her young friend. "Tell me and I'll do anything in the world for ye before I go away. Can I help ye, Eileen?"

"No, no. Ye'd help me, I know, but as it is ye'd be the last person in the world fit to help me," said Eileen, fixing a queer, hard look on Maureen. In that look hate and jealousy seemed to have mingled. "The luck came yer way, Maureen O'Malley, and it missed me!"

Again both became silent. Maureen gazed pensively at the fire, twirling a coil of her hair between finger and thumb. Eileen Conroy watched her and shook her head sadly from time to time, but suddenly rising to her feet she crossed to Maureen and put a hand on her shoulder.

"I don't know what to think," she said calmly while

her lips quivered as if from pain. "Here are the two iv us that were always friends, but now it looks as if there's somethin' between us, cuttin' us away one from the other. It's not that ye're goin' away, Maureen O'Malley. It's somethin' else."

"Him?" asked Maureen in a whisper, not raising her eyes from the fire.

"Ay, it's Cathal," Eileen replied in a choking voice. "Why is it at all, and us two the friends that we are? Oh, Maureen, Maureen."

The moan broke with such anguish from the girl that Maureen was filled with grief for her friend, and a feeling of affection, warmer than ever she had known before, rose in her heart. Their mutual sorrow melted the barrier that stood between them and seemed to bind them closer to one another.

"It's not your fault, Maureen."

"And it's not yours, and it's not his," said Maureen. "It had to be: but I'm goin' away, and then he'll see that ye're a far and away better girl than I am."

"But even with yerself gone, if ye do go, and, Maureen, I hope ye don't, what does it matter to Cathal in the way he looks at me?" said Eileen despondently. "I'm one iv the many that he might look at if he forgets yerself, a thing he'll never do, Maureen. I'm nothin' to him at all. It's 'Good day to ye, Eileen,' when he meets me and 'Good night t'ye, Eileen,' when he passes me on the road at night. And, Maureen, it's often that he passes me by at night and me standin' outside the door when he's goin' home. I wonder does he know why I'm standin' there sometimes, and it always every time when I know that he'll be passin' on his cart. Oh, Maureen, Maureen!" She clung closer to the girl and unburdened her soul. "There was black hate in my heart against ye the day when I saw ye standin' out there and him with his two hands round ye. Black hate, Maureen O'Malley. And I like ye, but at that minute ye were standin' between me and heaven. I'd give me soul to be in yer place, my body and soul. I would crawl on me hands and knees over briars,

I'd let him tramp on me if only he would catch me and kiss me as he kissed yerself the day. And ye're goin' away to leave him?" she asked in a hoarse whisper.

"I'm goin' away out iv his sight for ever," said Maureen in a tone of sorrowful resignation.

"But why, Maureen, why?" Eileen asked passionately. "Why are ye leavin' him and him lovin' ye as he does?"

"That's one reason that I'm goin' away," said Maureen with a sad smile. "He loves me so well that I can't make him a sorry man be marryin' him and have all the people talkin' behind our backs and making a mock iv him. And that would break the heart iv me. Say what ye like, Eileen, I'm goin'. I'll lose myself like a spark goin' up the chimley and no one will hear a word about me again. Maybe he'll be sorry after me a while, but as time goes on he'll forget all about me, and why shouldn't he? He's a young fellow."

"Ye speak just like an old woman," said Eileen. "Are ye in earnest with what ye say?"

Their eyes met, Eileen's filled with the glimmer of a vague hope, Maureen's with the premonition of a dread certainty. They clung to one another, both trembling, helpless. Maureen felt that she had no right in causing her friend such suffering. Eileen realized that she was mean and despicable in telling her own worries to a girl who had already such suffering heaped on her own shoulders. Unmitigated misfortune, heavy as rock, had fallen on both, crushing them to the ground. Sobbing, they looked at one another with piteous, childish eyes.

"Well, there's no good in crying about it!" said Maureen with an air of resolute self-reliance as she gently disengaged her arm from Eileen's and got to her feet. "There's no good in cryin' about it at all."

"No good at all," Eileen acquiesced lamely, but even as she spoke a fresh burst of sobbing shook her frame. Staggering to her feet, she threw out her arms and clasped Maureen. "It's my fault," she sobbed. "I shouldn't have come here to trouble ye. But then I knew that ye'd be lonely, and I was jealous of ye. . . . I did not know

what to do. And I love him, maybe as much as yerself, Maureen, and maybe more . . . but not more. I would have him if he'd take me, and I wouldn't care whether he suffered for it or not. . . . I don't know what I'm sayin' at all. If I went away would ye stay here and marry him? Maybe if ye would it would be easier to bear. A married man's married. And maybe if I went away I'd forget all about him and be happy beyont the mountains."

Eileen's voice as she spoke was very low but firm, as if trying to prevent something from mastering her. She looked very beautiful. A pink glow mantled her cheeks, her dark eyes were alight under her arched brows, her breath coming in short, labored gasps, panting as if for something which could never be attained. Without being conscious of the fact, the girl was pitying herself and in reality seeking help and consolation from her unhappy rival.

She glanced joylessly at Maureen as the girl sat by the dead fire, her dark, shiny hair curling over her beautiful shoulders, her face in profile showing the line of the straight nose and the contour of the rounded chin, an artist's model for his greatest masterpiece. Deep in her own thoughts she remained silent. Eileen looked at her from under her lashes. Her mad agitation was somewhat allayed by Maureen's avowal that she was going to leave the country, that is the parish; for to the Tirconail peasantry their country and in fact their very world is bounded by the hills that can be seen from the doorstep. But the peace of heart was only for a moment. Again that rankling jealousy which feeds its flame on the quiver of a lash, the trembling of a lip, a sigh, and sees a hidden purport in the slightest action, welled up in the heart of Eileen Conroy. It was all very well for Maureen to say that she was going away. She had not gone yet. And she never would go. If Cathal had a notion of her, big simple fool that he was, Maureen was not the girl to miss her chance. She would have him, being what she was.

Eileen Conroy got to her feet, went to the door, stood there for a moment as if considering something. Then she

looked back. Maureen was still sitting by the fire gazing pensively at the brown and white ashes. "She's never going away from here," said Eileen in an angry whisper and was on the point of saying so aloud, but something indeterminable exercised a subtle influence over the girl and compelled her to depart in silence.

Two hours afterwards, Kitty Cassidy, Cathal's mother, late home from the market, called to see Maureen O'Malley, and found her gone.

Though Maureen had disappeared, the house was occupied, and the occupant was Columb Ruagh Keeran. How he came to be there at that moment was not known. Of course he owned the farm by right of mortgage, the people knew; but that the mortgage had been paid that day by the girl giving Columb the right to her share of Crinnan was not as yet common knowledge. That he gave twenty pounds for this right became known later, and gave rise to much comment and heart-burning, especially amongst those who had been gulled by a glass or two of potheen when entering into transactions with Columb Ruagh Keeran.

But it was considered that Columb had other ends in view when he offered the girl twenty pounds, which was undoubtedly true, for Columb, a man of discrimination, studied the mental mood as well as the monetary need of the victims whom he intended to fleece. But how he intended to make ultimate profit from the girl Maureen O'Malley, was never known. Suffice for the purpose of the story to give Columb Ruagh Keeran's statement when Kitty Cassidy enquired of him if he knew where Maureen O'Malley had gone to.

"She's away, the poor girsha," he said. "Away to Strathbane with her pockets filled with money, for I have bought this farm and her right to Crinnan from the girl and paid her for it, money down."

TOWNLANDS

Now as townlands these three townlands are the best that can be seen,
Meenahalla and Strasallagh and Cagharacreen.
Now take the road to Rosses Beag as well as Rosses Wor,
And the townlands marching either hand are well above a score;
And mark them well in hill and holm, and bog and pasture land
And good strong houses standing snug and white on either hand.
"Good luck be on ye, decent man!" The girshas passing by
Will have the soft laugh on the lip, the brave look in their eye.
The hearty men: "It's warm indeed! Sit down, sir, if you please;
So have a pull iv this old pipe and make yourself at ease!"
"God bless you, decent man, the day!" the good housewife will say;
"And sit you down and eat a bit to help you on your way!"
And you that's on the Rosses road that runs to Rosses Wor
Will go through many a brave townland, and they're above a score.
But as townlands three townlands are the best you've ever seen,
Meenahalla and Strasallagh and Cagharacreen!

CHAPTER IV

Columb Ruagh Keeran

I

SALLY ROURKE, the medicine woman, a witch who ate her bread without blessing, as the neighbors affirmed, who held concert with powers of darkness, who knew legerdemain, black magic and the arts which are not good for a human soul, was sitting in her home on the lift of Meenaroodagh brae nursing her knees and warming her bare shins in front of her peat fire.

The Dungarrow people feared the old woman, but despite this they came to her when suffering from any ailment and besought her for a cure. Her mode of procedure when she took a case in hand was of a medico-religious character in which the herb cure and the fairy cure went hand in hand, where the faculty of medicine took almost second place to the magical ceremonies that accompanied it and where exorcism was considered of greater merit than castor-oil in curing a belly-pain.

The woman had cures for all ailments, the nightfire (fever), the wildfire (the red rash), measles, sore eyes, pains, sprains, sores, bruises, warts, styes, mumps and chincough. These cures and charms, with their mystic forms and mysterious rites, were, of no doubt, in a measure helpful, for faith works miracles amongst people who have an implicit belief in unseen spiritual agencies. But now alas! Dungarrow has turned a skeptical eye to these remedies. The people are becoming civilized, and civilization with aeroplanes in the sky over Sliab League, tanks on the crooked Tirconail roads, men of the Army of Occupation steel-helmeted and accoutered in the appointments

of battle drilling in the holms and forming fours round the raths sacred to the fairies, has no place in its make-up for old women's cures, spells and mystic incantations.

It was on the evening of the day on which Columb Ruagh met Maureen O'Malley on the road and shortly after parting from the girl that the man entered the house of Sally Rourke to find her sitting by the fire, warming her feet and legs after a day's wade through the bogs for leeches. The little things had fastened to her legs, and now the old woman was stopping the bleeding caused by their bites by applying cobwebs to the wounds.

The leeches that she had caught were now swimming gracefully through the water in a bottle which stood on the table. Columb could see the sheen on the greenish-black creatures as they curved and twisted in sinuous movements. Now their bodies turned up and he could see their mottled bellies; and again the flattened bodies stretched out straight, showing the rows of reddish and yellowish spots along their backs.

The woman looked round on hearing the noise of the door, and her face, thin, blue and rigid, reminded the man of a corpse. The eyes stared from their sunken pockets and told of a world of cunning concealed in their depths. Sally was an old crone, having passed her seventieth year by ten, and eligible for the Old Age Pension which she never claimed. Her dignity would not allow her to descend to this. She had lived for close on eighty years, and being able to take care of herself all that time she was not going to appeal to the parish now. Taking a pension in her opinion was synonymous with a charitable dole. "Other people can go to the parish when they get on in years," she asserted, "but not old Sally Rourke. My father and mother afore, God rest them! never went to the parish and I'm not going to shame them that went afore me."

Even Father Dan could not prevail on Sally to accept the Pension. "I would take it, myself," he said, "if I was offered it."

"That ye might, Father Dan," said the woman. "But then I'm one iv the Rourkes and not a McCabe."

She looked at the man who stood by the door, his hat pulled down over his eyes and his burden, the bag containing the pig, still on his back. The animal was grunting.

"Well, and what kind iv a fair was it the day?" she inquired, getting to her feet and coming towards the door. Her sight was failing and, her eyes unable to bear testimony to the evidence of the ears, she could not tell who the visitor was. But all the same she was not going to let any one find out this weakness of vision. The Rourkes always had good eyes. Her father, it was said, could see the very grass growing, and the daughter of that man could not confess that she lacked any of her people's attributes.

"I saw ye goin' down from the top of the hill the day," she croaked, "and I said to meself: 'There's a man that's goin' to buy out the whole market.' Them were my very words."

"But the money that one paid for beasts the day was big," said the man at the door, as he placed his burden on the ground. "I bought this wee bonnafan, Sally Rourke, and the money that I gave for it was terrible. I could buy a full-grown pig for the same money two years back."

"Then ye didn't strike a bargain, Columb Ruagh?" said Sally Rourke in a dry, cracked voice as if she spoke through a throat of cinders.

"A bargain, Sally Rourke!" exclaimed the man. "A bargain did ye say? There isn't a bargain to be had now. Ye need a pot iv gold sovereigns to lessen the stock iv the fair by one. And then it's a chance that ye'll ever get yer money back on it. The war maybe will stop and then it's the prices goin' down and sellin' the baste for silver that ye bought for gold."

"That's what ye've never done as yet, Columb Ruagh," said the woman. "Ye've the luck, and when a man has

that there's nothin' more to be said at all about the matter. It's luck that puts the guineas in the pocket."

"It is, I'll grant ye that, Sally Rourke," said Columb in a wry voice. "It's luck that gives a man a bit iv profit in a bargain."

"That indeed's true," said Sally, scratching the calves of her legs where they itched. "That's a true word, just as true as the old sayin' that said that nobody profits bar at the expense iv others."

"That's right, Sally Rourke," Columb admitted phlegmatically. "And I thought iv that and me comin' up here to tell ye that yer two stirks, the brannat one and the white-backed one, were across the ditch on the next farm that was once in the hands of Kathleen O'Malley, God rest her, but is mine now, be right iv mortgage and the twenty gold sovereigns that I gave to the poor woman twelve months ago, and her without a penny to call her own and next to nothin' then in her byre or bin. So when I saw yer two stirks on the farm across the ditch I thought to meself that nobody profits bar at the expense iv others."

The man's voice had taken on a melancholy tone.

"They've been across there all the day, I bate," he went on, "and me down at the fair tryin' to get a sucker to help me to make up the money that I paid for that farm. A good penny it was and me a poor man, that's tryin' to make a livin' somehow or the other up at the Crinnan cross-roads. These two stirks have been over the fence many's a time on the grass atin' it"—he smacked his lips as if munching the herbage himself and finding it to his taste—"the grass that I've paid for be hard work and scrapin' and scringin' day in and day out for the past twenty years or more."

"But they weren't over the ditch when I came down the hill half an hour back," said the old woman. "They were just lyin' the two iv them together at the back iv Garrybawn, and they looked as if they'd lie there all night without movin' a tail."

"That may be so," said Columb, with the air of a man who finds everything in life the reverse of that which is

anticipated. "And I believe it for I know that ye're a good dacent woman, Sally Rourke. But that and all, I gave twenty gold pounds for the farm and if I'm to feed all the stock iv the neighbors I don't see how I'm to get the money back. And it's not the first time that they've been there, them two stirks, Sally Rourke. I've seen them often beyont the ditch, but I've said nothin' because I know that ye're a dacent woman and wouldn't do me out iv me dues as a neighbor."

"That I wouldn't," said Sally Rourke. She was afraid of Columb.

The man glanced at her with a grin and said slowly:

"Iv course ye wouldn't, but that and all, I can't let trespassin' cattle be all day and night runnin' over me land. If they were on the other side of the fence once or twice it wouldn't matter a hair, but as it is they're there all day and all night," he said, his voice a strange mingling of levity and severity. "Ye never keep much iv an eye on them, and as they say, 'Nobody profits bar at the expense iv others,' so it looks as if all the profit goes to you, Sally Rourke, and all the expense is paid for be me."

"But all that two stirks ate when they go over is nothin' at all," pleaded the woman. "And if they go over they don't stay there long, for it's soon that ye'll chase them back, Columb Ruagh, if ye see them."

"That's it," said the man grimly. "If I see them. I don't often see them, I'll admit. That's because I'm not often down this way, but whenever I'm down this way I do see them. They never leave the place. So there's only one thing to be done and that's to drive them to the pound. And I'm goin' to do that now. I'm goin' up to the hill to drive them to the pound."

The woman, who was now sitting on the chair by the fire, sprung to her feet with a yell.

"Ye're the dirty spawn iv the divil, Columb Ruagh!" she shrieked. "In ye come here so that one would think butter wouldn't melt in yer mouth, and then ye talk about sendin' my poor bastes to the pound. And me a widow woman, too, Columb Ruagh. Go'n and drive them to the

pound if ye want to and may my curse be on yer head. Go'n! Out iv the house and away with them to the pound. Go'n, Columb Ruagh! Go'n, ye hell broth, ye! Go'n!"

Columb, who had lifted his bag again with the intention of carrying his threat into action, seemed to become disconcerted by the woman's wild outburst of wrath. He glanced at her uneasily, saw the fiery eyes deeply sunk in their wrinkled pockets, the contorted face, the fingers of her lean hands working like the claws of a cat. In another moment she would probably fly at the man and tear his face. Columb Ruagh placed the bag on the floor and sat down.

"Well, don't be gettin' so wild about it, Sally Rourke," he said in a temporizing tone. "Ye take everything too much to heart. The pound was only me fun."

"Go'n," said the woman. " 'Twas no fun. I know ye too well for that, Columb Ruagh. Ye'd take yer own father from his grave and put him to the pound. That ye would, Columb Ruagh."

The man held up a big open hand in front of the woman's face.

"Listen!" he said. "Now listen! It's the bad humor I'm in, anyway. Things have been goin' far from well for me iv late. First it's one thing and then the other, and the price that barley grain is goin' and meal seen and oatmeal. There's more money goes to the fillin' iv the still up there than comes out iv the worm, as the sayin' is. But that and all, Sally Rourke (and ye'll bear me out in what I say), I can see me way to help a friend when it's in me power to do so. I give yerself the fossaid[1] for next to nothin', Sally Rourke, and ye made a tidy penny on the same, sellin' it to the neighbors for sprains and hacks and cuts. Ye'll bear me out in that, Sally Rourke, won't ye?"

"I will, that," said the woman, now somewhat mollified, seeing that the danger of getting her two stirks pounded was past. "But, Columb Ruagh," she hastened to add,

[1]*Fossaid. Foreshot.* In distilling, the first spirits to come through the worm.

"the fossaid is iv no good to yerself, for nobody would go to ye if they had a hack or a sprain, would they?"

"They maybe would," said Columb. "And it's maybe sixpence I'd get for a taste iv the fossaid now and again. And a sixpence is a lot."

"But not to a man like yerself," said the woman. "And ye rotten with money."

"It goes, Sally, it goes," said Columb with a sorrowful shake of his head. "Money goes one way and another like corn through a riddle. The minute that one grain comes out another's after it just like tryin' a race. And if ye put yer finger in one hole to stop the leak out it comes iv another hole. It's enough to drive a man mad and wrong in the head, the way that money has iv goin'. Even the day, and me after payin' a round sum for that sucker, I met Maureen O'Malley on the road and her breakin' her heart on her mother that's gone, God rest her! And she hasn't a brown penny piece to her name. But I told her that I wouldn't see her bate and it was money from me pocket at once to tidy her over for a bit and help her, poor girl."

Columb stopped short, his memory bringing back the face of the young girl as he saw it an hour previously, the eyes wet with tears, the lips curved in a sad smile. "Why does her face keep comin' up in front iv me?" he asked himself in a voice that rose above a whisper.

"What's that?" asked Sally Rourke.

"About the poor girl, Maureen O'Malley," said Columb, mobilizing the threads of the conversation and getting them into trim again. "I helped to tidy her a wee bit over her troubles, and that iv course was money out for me again. It's a sin the way that him that should be takin' care iv her now has left her to herself and the mercy iv her neighbors," he said, his voice rising in an effort to ward off the question which he saw forming on the lips of the old woman. "It's a sin for him to leave her that way to herself and him gettin' on so well, the vagabond. To think that he should dare to do it, the dhirty rascal. Every one is down on him now, every one in the place."

"Who is it that ye're meanin'?" came the woman's question.

"The man that done it," said Columb. "I'm half a mind to get hold iv him and make him do the right thing be the girl. She's alone now and nobody to say a word in her favor, or help her. I had to give her the few pennies, and I'm a poor man, Sally Rourke, that'll keep the roof over her head. Ah! the dhirty, dhirty rascal!"

"Who is it, then?" asked the woman.

"It doesn't matter to yerself who it is," said Columb in an excited voice. "I suppose ye know as well and better than any iv us. We were in doubts about it till last night, and then we heard—"

"Who told ye, then?" asked Sally Rourke. "Who was the one that told ye?"

"Himself," said Columb with a wink. "He came down to the road last night, and he was in the wildest state. He was cryin' like a child, and says he: 'It was me that was to blame, and it's me that didn't spake about it for the last seventeen years when I should have taken that woman, God rest her! and got married on her. And what can I do now?' says he. 'Her dead and can't be helped.' 'But help the girl that's left,' says I. 'Make it right for her, and it won't be so bad.' "

"But the poor plaisham hasn't the face to let Cassie Shemus Meehal know," said Sally Rourke, staggering across the floor and looking at Columb Ruagh. "She'd tear his eyes out!"

Columb got to his feet, then sank into the chair again, gasping as if a pail of icy water had been emptied down his neck. His mouth hanging open, his eyes sticking out of his head as if imaginary fingers were gouging them from their sockets, he stared at Sally Rourke.

"What's comin' over ye at all, Columb Ruagh?" she inquired in a frightened voice. "Is it a fit that's on ye? Lie as ye are and I'll put some cold water down yer neck. It'll help, Columb. Lie aisy, now, and hold yer head back. Is it a fit?"

"Mr. Brogan!" the man exclaimed, pulling himself together. "Mr. Brogan! Eamon na Sgaddan! Mother iv God!"

II

Columb Ruagh was at this time reputed to be one of the wealthiest men in Dungarrow. How he got his money and where he got it was a mystery which even the oldest and most astute inhabitant of the place could not fathom, though in the parish all have a good memory and are stock full of curiosity that pries deeply into the affairs of a neighbor.

Columb Ruagh was the son of Columb Keeran. The father was in his day, before he dropped over Kinranna Bridge in a flood and got drowned, an object of great interest to the natives. This was in a great measure due to the man's strange methods of life, his queer mentality, cross-grained disposition and peculiar nature. His vanity, over-weening self-conceit, airs, pretensions and mannerisms were for a long time the subjects of innumerable tales, most of them containing at least some item of truth which fascinated the gossips of the place.

If Columb sold a cow for eight pounds at the fair of Stranarachary, that cow, according to the man's account of the sale given to a neighbor ten minutes later, was sold for eight pounds ten shillings, two and six luck's money; ten minutes later, for eight pounds ten shillings, money down; and in this way the money received for the cow would go on increasing until by the time he got home and furnished an account of the day's marketing to his wife, Nelly Cosdhu (dubbed thus because she always went barefooted and never washed her feet), the price he got for that cow had increased to ten guineas.

"And where's all that money?" the wife would inquire, as she counted the sum handed over to her keeping.

"If it's not all there, all that I said," Columb would reply, "it's because I spent it like a gentleman."

What Columb meant by spending money which he had

never received, as a gentleman, was very hard to determine. A gentleman amongst the peasantry is always credited with the large heart and lavish hand, but neither of these was possessed by Columb Ruagh Keeran. Despite his ostentation, pomposity and pretensions, Columb was a mean man, slow in paying stipends, reckonings and rents, but quick to give a beggarman what in Columb's estimation a beggar deserved, "a shirtful of sore bones."

When a beggar new to the place went up to Columb's door, every window in the townland had its eye, every door an interested spectator. "There's a poor man goin' to Columb's!" was the cry. "God look on him, the poor divil." Though those who had seen the beggar a moment before did not warn him against Keeran, they prayed for his safety now that he was running into the mouth of danger; but all the same they waited expectantly for the anticipated trouble.

They could see the man stand at the door, shove it open and enter. Then the next minute they would see him come out, Columb holding him by the scruff of the neck and tail of his coat. He would lead the beggar to the verge of the street, hold him there for a second, then shove him down the brae that dipped from the house to the river bank. The shove was generally such a strong one that the poor man would topple over, drop his mauleen and roll like a top to the bottom of the brae. Following the poor man would come the white potatoes which rolled from his bag when it dropped to the ground.

"There, ye vagabone, ye!" Columb could be heard shouting. "It's half the crops iv the parish that ye're carryin' in yer mauleen. Ye're a curse to the place, you and ones like ye! Beggin' and scringin' and scringin' and beggin'. Scoot out iv it, ye rip! Out iv it, ye rip, and never let me see yer face again! And don't come back and lift the pratees. Out off me farm with ye or I'll put the dogs in ye!"

Thus admonished, when he got to his feet the beggarman would not come back again. In fact he would get off Columb's land without lifting the white potatoes from the

brae. These would be gathered up a few minutes afterwards by Nelly Cosdhu and taken in to fill the store which Columb had in his own bin.

Added to his meanness Columb was afflicted with a mad jealousy, a moral eczema, which increased its irritation the more it was clawed. He was afraid that some man or men would enter his home by night and steal his wife, that some man would fascinate her with a look as she went to Mass on a Sunday and take her away, that a neighbor would come under his own roof one day, pay attention to Nelly and cause the poor woman to forget her marriage vows. At night Columb locked his gate, barred it, built entrenchments round the hedges, barricaded the door before he went to bed. Even in bed he felt suspicious of the world outside, and often in the dark hour his wife would waken to hear her man up and about nailing the window-shutters to the sill and wedging the hasp of the door.

When she went to Mass on a Sunday he always accompanied her, his eyes, forbidding and stern, weighing every action, every nod and handshake of the men who spoke to Nelly. Causes the most slender fed the secret disease and every good-day, *cead mhille failthe* and *slan-leath* added flame to the fire of the furious jealousy which burned in his heart. To him Nelly's slightest smile, word or gesture, trifles devoid of interest to the world at large, presented tangible qualities and special properties. Even when Nelly grew old and wrinkled, when her head bent earthwards under the weight of years, when her breath became wheezy and her eyes filmy, Columb was still prey to his groundless fears, as a dog that buries a marrow-dry bone snarls at all who look on the spot where the worthless bone is hidden.

In view of what was known and what was rumored Columb was left very much to himself, and as far as could be ascertained he desired nothing better. He thatched his own house, cut his own turf, delved his fields and set his own potatoes. This was some years after his marriage, for prior to then he coöperated with his neighbors in doing

jobs that took more than one man to complete. When he did this, his neighbors, up to mischief when they found a butt for their jokes, played on Columb's innate susceptibilities. "There's Sahn Eamon Andy that's just gone into yer house," they might say, and Columb would throw down his implement of labor, seize his coat and rush off to the house in which Nelly Cosdhu all alone was doing her daily round of housekeeping. For the rest of that day Columb would not be seen by his neighbors.

After a while, however, he would not come out to do a hand's turn on a neighbor's farm. He kept to himself, tilled his own ground, planted his potatoes and corn without soliciting help or assistance from any neighbor. When he went to Mass on Sundays he took Nelly with him, and even when she went to confession he sat outside the confessional and waited until she had told the priest her sins. Few indeed they must have been, for Nelly Cosdhu never even had the chance of sinning.

"God help the poor man," said the people of Dungarrow. "He's even afraid that the priest will run away with old Nelly, and her! If he tied her to a stake in a ten-acre field not a one in the parish would touch her with a pitchfork."

Three children were born of the marriage. Two of them died before reaching the age of seven, but the other, the youngest, survived and grew up to be a strapping boy, the very get of his father in physique. And probably in temperament, too, though this was difficult to know as yet, for, as the Dungarrow people said: "A Keeran's never known till he gets buckled."

At the age of eighteen Columb Ruagh, the boy, was one of the strongest youngsters in the parish, endowed with enormous vitality and vigor, having a backbone for any burden and grit to tackle the hardest task. His early manner of living did much to bring this about. When he was aged twelve his father pulled him from the bed every morning at six with the cry of: "Get up, my young vagabone. There never was a sglawvy in this house yet, and ye're not going to be one." This was the father's benedic-

tion, greeting and command every morning, summer and winter, as he pulled the youngster from the blankets and sent him to his work. Breakfast was given him at nine o'clock, dinner at one and supper at six in the evening, and all day long the youngster worked hard at various jobs on the farm, doing a man's labor when he was fourteen and two men's work when he was eighteen.

At this age he buried his father and mother, Columb first, who happened to fall into the river one night when coming from the market, and Nelly a week afterwards. She went to bed one night, but the next morning when her son called her she didn't answer him. He went across to the bed, touched her shoulder, but she did not move. She was dead.

Thus in his eighteenth year was the boy left on his own to fight his battle in the world, a weather-hardened animal who had never been to school, who went into his first boots on the day his father went into the coffin. He liked the boots, the pliant leather that shone so brightly when he rubbed it with a woolen rag, the bright nails that glittered like stars against the dun leathern background of the soles. Though soft to the touch, these boots hurt his feet when he put them on and worked in them. After a time he decided to work as of old, barefooted, and save the shoe leather for Sundays when he went to Mass.

"Now I'll get up in the morning when I want to," he said on the evening following his father's funeral, but the next morning he found himself out of bed as early as before. In fact earlier, for now he was conscious of his responsibilities, eager to perform the tasks which confronted him, and ready to tackle the future which had to be hewn on the way towards wealth and prosperity.

But his first year as a man working on his own was steeped in adversity. The crops failed, the meadow land was swept by floods when the harvest was cut, and the corn, light of ear, rotted in the stooks. At the end of the year when reckoning was made, Columb found that farming was not a success. The tillage of the fields had not paid for the sweat expended in the labor.

"It's not goin' to pay," said Columb. "Next year I'm goin' across the water and see if I can make better fist iv Scotland."

On the following spring he mortgaged his farm, packed his belongings in a bundle and crossed to Scotland, where he took up work as a casual laborer. For two years he remained away, then came back to his native place with money and to spare but not to spend. He was a close-fisted youth of twenty-one, sublimely conscious of his own worth and proud of his bodily strength.

He entered the games of the countryside and threw a stone further than Searlas Dhu O'Friel, who, although a Drimeeney man, was up till that time the champion stone-thrower of the parish. Columb was mighty at the tug of war, supple at hurling and first favorite at running and jumping. The other young men, though beaten by Columb at every game, felt proud of the giant. His prowess filled them with instinctive respect, and when he entered a field ready for the sports, his sleeves turned up to the elbow, the collar of his shirt turned down, showing a massive neck and the muscles of a broad chest, the boys turned one to another and nodded, as much as to say: "There's a man for you, a towney of our own and afraid of no man." But when the old people heard remarks like these they shook their heads and murmured: "The get iv his father, and God help the woman that gets him when he takes it into his head to marry."

But although Columb had a farm of land, now let out as security for money advanced, but his whenever he desired, as he had money and plenty of it, he did not show the least interest in the girls of the place. If he went to a dance, he danced with the best of them, kicking roof-high in six-hand reel and Alaman, but never escorted a girl home as other young men did.

Of course this was remarked upon by the natives. It was not altogether correct. A young man should run after the girshas. If he did not do so when young when would he do it? Youth was the time for soft talk and skifting, the day for the girls. But as they said this they

would call to mind that the late Columb behaved in the same manner when he was a youngster; in fact the younger man was the spit of his father.

"And see the way that it turned out with him," they would add, nodding their heads knowingly, pleased at their own subtlety in discovering such similarity between father and son. In fact there was a dark inference to be drawn from the remark, an inference which was in some measure a confident prophecy.

But something unforeseen occurred on the March following Columb's return. One morning the trees on the roadway, the bridges, the walls of the market-house at Stranarachary were plastered with bills telling that the farm of Columb Keeran was up for auction. The farm contained twenty-seven acres (more or less), part good meadow-land, part arable land in a high state of cultivation, thirteen acres suitable for grazing sheep or young cattle, and two acres turbary. This farm, well-drained and fenced in good-sized fields, was held under the good Irish Marquis of Bristol at the low half-yearly rent of one pound, eleven and sixpence. There was a splendid one-storied thatched dwelling-house and out-houses all in extra good order.

The people of Dungarrow were surprised. Auctioneers had never before taken part in their sales. They could manage their business themselves. When they wanted to let land or sell it they tipped the wink, as they said, to a neighbor, telling him perhaps not to let anybody know anything about it, and two hours later this titbit would become the common property of the parish. If anybody wanted to buy, the vendor would soon find a bidder calling to test the truth of the rumor. In this way, by a little bit of secret diplomacy, the seller would be saved the necessity of paying auction fees. But Columb Ruagh did not descend to stratagem of this kind. He went to the auctioneer and placed the terms of sale in his hands.

That Columb auctioned was in a measure surprising, but what gave rise to talk and gossip was the description of the steading as given in black and white on the auction

bills. "Twenty-seven acres indeed!" said the gossips. "More or less! A flea could cover it in a hop, step and leap. Part good meadow land and part arable land in a high state of cultivation! It might be if the hay wasn't so easy washed away be the floods and the crops came up! And the rent low! Old Columb never said that, and he was always slow in payin' it. And the house isn't so bad if it was thatched and the cow and hens kept out iv it. But I suppose the auctioneer must do everything, bar tell the truth for his money."

The farm was sold a week later for the sum of one-hundred-and-thirty-seven pounds ten shillings. A man from Frosses, the adjoining parish, bought it.

"And paid for it up to the nail," said the people. "It's a fool that would give more than eighty pounds for the holdin'. What's Columb goin' to do now?"

The first job essayed by Columb following the receipt of the money was a bit of simple tailoring. He had two coats, one new and woolen warranted to wear, the other rent and frayed as was to be expected, seeing that the man had worn this garment for close on two years. With the time-worn coat Columb lined the other, and lined it in a peculiar manner. He cut the material in little squares and sewed these squares to the inside of the good coat, one square matching another. Inside each of these squares was a sovereign, set like an Agnus Dei in a scapular. Viewed from the outside when the job was completed the coat had the appearance of a quilted eiderdown in make if not in texture.

A few days later Columb put his clothes in a bundle, made for the Derry boat and crossed over to Scotland, coated in gold and his mind afire with plans for the future. What was a farm compared to the hard ready cash which it had brought him? To the pile in his possession he would go on adding little by little, bit by bit. Then one day he would have more money than anybody in the parish, boxes filled with gold buried in the ground, their location known to nobody save himself.

Confused images were formed in his mind as he sat on

the deck of the Derry boat, his bundle under him and his wealth in his raiment. His thoughts acquired a magic power as he nodded sleepily at the base of the funnel while the smoke trailed over his head splashed with sparks. To the man every spark became a piece of gold; his eyes were dazzled by them. He wanted money, money! He was going to make it. As he sat there he felt that from now forward he had only one desire, gold.

When he arrived in Scotland he found it was difficult to obtain employment. The season was bad, the jobs in which he had worked before were now filled up or closed down. The unemployed crowded the streets of the towns, flowed out into the country, filled up all available openings on railway and farm. The engineer had left down the rule and taken up the hoe; dongarees were supplanted by moleskins. The artisan had descended to casual labor, the navvy had become a tramp.

But Columb, with that cunning which is so often the property of the uneducated and that strength of will possessed by those who have only one object in view, managed to eke out a livelihood despite hindrance, hardship and adverse circumstances. It was not for nothing that his father had taken the youngster's upbringing in hand. The hard life, cold and hunger of his early years had kneaded the physique of the boy, made a man of him as a child, and therefore he was proof against any hardships now. He tramped about from town to town, working a day here and a day there, sleeping in barns, hay stacks and under bridges. When others stood shivering in the cold, Columb slept, indifferent to all temperatures and warm in his cloak of gold.

Though his bedmates were often men who would stop at nothing to get possession of a coin, they never interfered with Columb. He looked so powerful that no man would dare tackle him, even when he slept. Besides, he dressed so shabbily that no man thought it worth his while to tackle him for any money which he might possess.

But despite prudence, parsimony, and his efforts to block every hole in the sieve of expenditure, Columb found that

the gold of which he dreamt on the Derry boat was as difficult to catch as the sparks falling from the smoke of the funnel. At the end of three months he had only added two gold pieces to his pile, one piece a sovereign and the other valued at half that amount.

Then at the end of that time, in the middle of June to be correct, Columb fell in luck's way. One morning when coming through the town of Port Glasgow he met a man at the entrance of a close rubbing the blood from his face and filling a deserted street with his maledictions. Not a window was open, no curious eyes stared out at the irate man. In this locality incidents like this were of such common occurrence that no sleeper would forsake his bed in order to view the proceedings.

Columb when he came abreast of the man paused and looked at him.

"What's wrong with ye, good man?" he inquired.

"Wha's wrang!" repeated the man, in a high screech. "Wha's wrang! I'll tell ye, callant. The dirrty whoor up there"—he pointed a bloodstained thumb at the window—"has done me oot o' seven poons."

"She has, then?" said Columb, coming closer, a covetous gleam in his eyes. "Seven pounds!"

"Seven poons!" yelled the man. "And then got me chucked doon stairs."

"Herself that threw ye out, was it?" asked Columb.

"Catch me lettin' a strip o' a hussy throw me out!" said the man. " 'Twas her bully! The whoor's bully!"

"Ye ought to have kept clear iv the house," said Columb.

"I'll tell ye what," said the man, looking at Columb's shoulders and feeling his face with his eyes. "Ye're a strong laddie, and if ye help me to get the siller back from that woman I'll gie ye a poon o' the money."

"In this way," said Columb, in a brisk voice, entering the close.

"Up the stairs, first landing," said the man, following on the heels of the avenger.

They came to a door that stood ajar with one panel shattered as if some one had tried to shove a foot through it.

"In there, laddie," said the bloodstained man, sheltering himself behind the massive bulk of Columb Ruagh.

The Irishman shoved the door open and entered. In a bed near the wall a woman was lying. A dark man, bristly and dirty, sat on a chair by a dead fire taking off his boots. As Columb came in the woman sat up in bed and set a frightened stare on him; the man holding the end of a lace between his finger and thumb glanced round and fixed a pair of scowling eyes on the intruders.

"Back again?" said the woman when she saw the bloodstained man. "What d'ye want the noo?"

"My seven poons," was the reply.

"And what are ye after?" asked the man with the shoelace, glaring angrily at Columb. He measured the Irishman with a scornful look and got to his feet.

"I've come with this dacent man to help him to get the money ye've robbed him iv," said Columb, magnificently calm. "Hand it over at once."

"Awa oot o' the hoos at yince with ye," said the woman, rising from the bed and placing her naked feet on the floor. Her shift torn at neck and hip exposed half her body. "Gie him a cloot on the lug, Donal."

The dark man rushed at Columb, hit him full on the face and almost knocked him down. The man who had lost seven pounds drew back several paces and watched the ensuing contest from the safety of the landing. But the struggle was a very short one, for the dark man following his blow was seized by Columb round the waist and shook like a rat in the grip of a terrier.

"I'll kick the guts out iv ye," said the red-haired man with an oath as Donal screamed under his pressure as if he had been under a granite mill-stone. "Where's the money, ye dirty sneakin' cur? Where's the money?"

"Let me go and I'll tell ye!" panted the man. "My arm's bruk! Ye're chokin' me! Let me go!"

Columb released the man, who immediately he was free turned to the woman.

"Gie the man the siller!" he yelped, fuming with rage and resentment. "Gie it him and let him clear oot."

The woman obeyed as a she-wolf obeys its mate, with a snarl, fumbled under the pillow and drew out a fistful of money which she handed to Columb. He took it, spread it out on his palm and counted it. Then he put it in his pocket.

"It's mine," said the man at the door, who hadn't spoken a word for some time.

"Yes, be damned!" growled Columb. "Ye're not worth it! When I was gettin' this man to see sense ye were jookin' behind the door like a wean that's afeeard iv gettin' its bottom skelped. Scoot!"

Both went out, the little man in front, eager to keep out of Columb's reach. When they came to the street the little man stopped and looked at Columb Ruagh. The sun was rising and the shadows of the houses lay across the gray-blue streets. The hour was close on five.

"Ye can keep yin poon and gie's the other six," said the little man.

"To the divil with ye!" said Columb Ruagh with a snort and walked away. Fortunately for him the town was deserted. Not a policeman was to be seen. The two left the town by the main road, Columb in front, the little man following, shouting at the top of his voice. Here they met a gang of railwaymen coming in from a night shift.

"He robbed me o' seven poons," said the little man, but the workers to whom he spoke were too weary to take any interest in his trouble. Besides, the affair was none of theirs.

"Knock him down and take it from him," was the perfunctory advice of one.

"A man wi' shouthers like that," said the little man, who still, despite Columb's formidable appearance, continued following him. When they reached the lonely road near the hamlet of Langbank, Columb took to his heels and proceeded to run. His pursuer also ran, but after a while when he saw the distance between himself and Columb Ruagh increase, he gave it up as a bad job and returned to Port Glasgow.

At two o'clock in the afternoon Columb arrived at the

Glasgow free coup on Houston Moss, and here he met Mr. Brogan, towney of his own, whom he had not seen since the dance at Neddy Og's on the previous Candlemas night. The account of this meeting has been already told.

Towards sunset Columb arrived at a big house near Paisley and asked for bit and sup, being a poor man out of work who had tried his best to get a job, but without success.

"And if a job is offered you would you take it?" asked the elderly gentleman to whom Columb addressed his question and who happened to be the proprietor of the house.

"That I would," said Columb.

"Well, I need a man to help the gardener," said the old man. "Do you think you can do that sort of work?"

"That I can," Columb replied.

Next day Columb started work on the gentleman's estate and remained there for two years. At the end of that time, the old man died and in his will left one hundred pounds to each of his servants who had served him loyally and faithfully for a period of two years and over. Columb got his hundred pounds and with this in his keeping he returned to his native parish a rich man.

III

If traced on a map of Tirconail the parish of Dungarrow would in outline have the appearance of a fan partly folded, its outer guards the boundaries of the parish. One of these rests on Sliab League, the other on the boglands of Frosses. The leaf of the fan lies at an oblique angle, its axis on the hills of Crinnan, from which the fan slopes downwards till it trails its outer verge in the waves of Gweenora Bay.

In Drimeeney or any sea-bordering townland of Dungarrow a towney may speak of being next-door neighbor to America, but if he happens to live in the townland of Crinnan, which has no boundary, march ditch or boreen, he lives next to no place, an outcast, a resident of the townland that is at the back of Godspeed, of which no map

gives location or latitude. Crinnan belongs to everybody, which means that it belongs to none; Crinnan has only one building, which was erected by a potheen-maker in the old days; Crinnan has seldom echoed to the foot of an ubiquitous policeman; Crinnan is a deserted waste of hill and bog, the outermost townland in the parish of Dungarrow.

The road from Dungarrow going eastwards runs over Crinnan hill, and here it forks into two, one leading to Doonwell (a resort of pilgrims) and the other going to the little village of Kineeragh where the natives, workers in wool, sell their webs of homespun on market days.

The townland of Crinnan belonged in common to the residents of Meenaroodagh, Meenarood, and Meenadinnagh. But none had the least interest in the place. It was not worth while putting stock to graze there; young stirks stuck in the marshes, sheep fell over the precipices, cattle strayed and were never found again. In short, Crinnan was of no use as pasture, meadow, bog, or building-land. This was the opinion of the Dungarrow people.

But Columb Ruagh Keeran returned from Scotland with a different opinion in his head. He had money, but no home, the desire to make money and little prospect of making it if he set out in the same way as the residents of Dungarrow. But the astute Columb had a scheme in his head. He wanted Crinnan, the whole townland, to use it as he thought fit without let or hindrance, and he determined that he should have it.

As a preliminary he took the ruined house by the Crinnan cross-roads. The house had been there for years, but none except wandering tinkers ever made use of it. Columb took it over from the tinkers, and after he had done so the tinkers (there were three strong men in the gang) came down the Dungarrow road swathed in bandages, the men streaming with blood, the women shrieking imprecations, the children howling, and all full of the story of a red-haired madman who had attacked them at the Crinnan cross-roads and half murdered them.

Columb now became owner. There was a doorway, he

built a door; a fireplace, and he made a fire. Where he got the wood for the door and the turf for the fire was unknown. But no one questioned him about these matters. Columb was a strong man with a temper, and the people were afraid of him.

In possession of the house, Columb Ruagh set himself out with the object of getting possession of the townland. He got the local schoolmaster, Mick Gallagher, to write out a form saying that: "We who have signed our names hereunder give to Mr. Columb Keeran the right to use the lands known as Crinnan and bounden, etc., for any purpose which he sees fit. Signed and dated under our hands Anno Domini 18—"

To write this was an easy job for Mick Gallagher, a scholar second to none, but getting possession of this land, which was of no use to any one save to Columb Ruagh Keeran, was a job beset with many difficulties.

Condy Heelagh would give his portion and welcome, because it was no good at all to himself, but he never liked to put down his name in black and white to anything. One never knows, you know.

"But ye cannot write at all, Condy," said Mick Gallagher, who was party to the proceedings.

"Well, that's the reason that I don't want to begin," said the astute Condy.

"Ye don't need to write at all," the master explained. "All that ye need to do is this," and as he spoke, the schoolmaster stuck his forefinger against the soot on the back of the chimney and drew a cross on the limewashed wall.

"With soot, like that?" Condy questioned.

"No," said the schoolmaster. "Just with the pen on white paper."

Seeing that drawing a cross was such a simple thing, and being fascinated by its novelty, Condy Heelagh signed away his property in Crinnan.

Coy Fergus Beeragh would not sign. He was not afraid of putting his name down like Condy Heelagh. He knew the world and was a scholar, a man who could read and

write. But that and all he was not going to sign anything. If it was the man that had the place close on forty years ago he would sign Crinnan, aye and his own house and home over to him, for he was a man that could do things. The potheen that this man (long dead he is, God rest him!) made was the best that Coy ever drank in the barony. Crinnan was no good for setting or grazing or cutting turf, but as a place for making potheen it had no equal. If a man took the place to make potheen, ah! There was a world of meaning in the expressive ah! and the wink which accompanied it.

A week later Columb brought Coy a bottle of potheen, and Coy signed away his right to part, portion and share of the Crinnan uplands.

The potheen worked miracles with others. Columb seemed able to lay his hand on the stuff, not only in bottles but in jars and kegs. Whisky was dear to buy, and after all, leaving aside the taste, potheen had just the same effect as bottled usquebagh from O'Ryan's shop in Stranarachary. And then potheen could be had for next to nothing, just for the mere signing away of land that was good for neither man nor beast.

Besides, poor Columb wanted a home, and a man that had the courage to go and live up there in Crinnan at the back of Godspeed deserved to be helped. And the people would help Columb Ruagh Keeran, a dacent man, a man without his heart in the penny piece, a respectable youngster, a credit to the place, etc., etc. So they signed over the land, drank the free potheen while Columb chuckled in his beard and added to his acres.

But success is not for every day, and Columb Ruagh found this to his cost when he called on Mr. Brogan. Now Eamon na Sgaddan had big footing in Crinnan, rights due to luck of birth, accident of death and hazard of marriage. When Columb Ruagh Keeran spoke to Mr. Brogan about the matter, Mr. Brogan said: "See Cassie Shemus Meehal about it." This Columb did.

He found the woman in her home washing some clothes,

a washboard and tub on a chair by the door, her arms elbow-deep in soapsuds.

"Well, good day to ye, Cassie Shemus," said Columb, as if something mutually interesting and known to both had just occurred and gave him the privilege of opening the conversation in this familiar manner.

"Well, good day to yerself, Columb Ruagh," said Cassie. "It's long, long since I've seen ye over this doorstep."

"Not since your poor father died, God rest him!" said Columb Ruagh, with a sound something between a dry cough and a sigh, which possibly was intended for an expression of grief.

"I mind ye comin' then," said Cassie with a wry pucker of her lips. "I mind ye at the wake but not at the buryin'."

"I was only a gàsair then," said Columb. "Comin' on fifteen only."

" 'Twas old Columb that wasn't at the buryin' either," said Cassie, rubbing a red flannel shirt against the fluted ridging of the washboard. "I suppose it was the shillin' for offerin's that kept him away."

"Well, he was a funny old laddybuck anyway," said Columb flippantly, striving to appear humored at his father's parsimony. "But that's gone and past and the old times were the funny times."

"Well, I suppose ye haven't come here for nothin'," said the woman, putting her hands to her side and looking at Columb Ruagh. "Ye haven't come here for nothin', so out with it, whatever it is, and let me get on with me work."

"This is the way iv it, then," said Columb, feeling that it would be wise to place the facts of the case before her as succinctly as possible. "Ye're a business woman, a respectable woman and dacent into the bargain. It's about Crinnan. I'm trying to get a bit iv that land up there, that's no good for man or baste and that's iv as little use to any one as a patch on the backside of a scarecrow. I'm

a poor man, Cassie Shemus, without any home but what the tinkers stay at night in, but a poor man must do somethin' to take in the bread and butter. Now somethin' to warm the discourse afore we go any further," said Columb, taking a black bottle from his pocket.

"This is the best iv stuff, and a wee drop is the finest thing in the world," he went on. "And if ye want fossaid for sprains or airrid[1] (ye've airrid on yer wrists, Cassie Shemus Meehal), I'll give ye as much as ye want and never ask ye for a penny for it. And . . ."

"That's enough," said Cassie Shemus Meehal, breaking in on his discourse and clutching the rim of the washing tub. "Scoot! I don't want to hear any more iv yer old snash."

"But listen to me," said Columb.

"Scoot!" said Cassie Shemus Meehal.

"Listen. Just a minute! Listen!"

"Ye'll get this down yer back if ye're not out iv the house at once," said the woman, lifting the tub from the chair.

"But the land that ye have up there ye never make use iv," said Columb. "Ye've neither sheep nor—"

She raised the tub and with a mighty heave flung its contents towards him. The full force of the water caught the man on the neck and almost tossed him over. He heaved out of it, steaming, spluttering and choking.

"Scoot!" he heard Cassie shout.

"Ye dhirty bitch iv hell," yelled Columb. "For two straws I'd wring yer neck from yer shoulder."

He made a step towards her, then as if thinking better of it he turned on his heel and walked away, the soapy water running from his coat on to his trousers and from his trousers into his boots.

In the days that followed the man was the prey of two desires, one the acquisition of money, the second to get the acres which by luck of birth, accident of death and hazard of marriage belonged to Eamon na Sgaddan and his woman, Cassie Shemus Meehal. In the first he was

[1]*Airrid.* Hacks and scars on the skin caused by weather and work.

successful. Crinnan, fenced and drained all by the labor of one man, had changed from a wilderness into first-class grazing ground that Columb kept white with fleeces. Money was pouring in and Columb was now reputed to be the richest man in the parish; "and all that money was made on a keg of potheen," Dungarrow said.

Seventeen years following the date on which he took possession of the house at Crinnan cross-roads, a certain incident occurred in the house of Sally Rourke, and following this incident Columb Ruagh Keeran saw a means towards an end and the realization of a desire.

IV

Darkness had long since fallen, and a moon, full the previous night, was rising over the hills of Tirconail, which showed in dark, bulky masses against the Eastern sky. The river that rose from the Crinnan uplands could be heard wailing its way down the holms to the sea, and the clusters of hazel-bushes which lined the stream looked like gangs of evil specters plotting mischief in the gloom. Sky and land were speckled with stars, heavenly and earthly, stellary and paraffin, the first gleaming from the unutterable deep, the second from the cabins of Dungarrow.

Amidst these earthly stars, one gleamed from the window of Mr. Brogan's house, where that habitation rested snug and sheltered in a groin of land on the Meenaroodagh braes. The being of this particular star was a paraffin lamp without a globe which stood on the kitchen table and shed a hard glow on the interior of the house, lighting up the delf on the dresser, the clock over the fireplace and the dog lying on the hearth, its nose resting on its forepaws and the paws stuck in the turf ashes.

Only one person was now in the house, Mr. Brogan. His wife, Cassie Shemus Meehal as she was still known, had left the house half an hour ago with the intention of going to Paddy Keefe's shop for provisions, leaving her man to take care of the house during her absence. "Take and look at the fire and don't let it out when I'm away,"

she said as a parting behest. "And don't let the cat at the crame, and don't sit in the chair all the time with one hand as long as the other!"

"I'll do as ye bid me, Cassie," said Eamon passively, without rising from his seat.

At the present moment the fire was almost out and the cat, surfeited on cream from the crock on the dresser, was lying on the roof-beam asleep. Neither of these happenings had been noticed by Eamon, who was still seated on the chair by the table just as his wife had left him, both arms hanging limp by his side, his mouth open and his eyes fixed in a vacant stare at the opposite wall. Once he roused himself, pressed both hands against his kidneys and seemed as on the point of rising. But thinking better of it, as it seemed, he shook his head gloomily and relapsed into the old pithless posture.

"Fate!" he moaned, feebly. "Fate! Can I endure it? Can I endure it?"

Even as he spoke a low sound startled him. It seemed as if a bag of wool or meal was being drawn across the street. How it could be drawn was a mystery as the man's ears could not detect the sound of footsteps. Immediately he was on his feet, however, for he suddenly realized that Cassie Shemus Meehal would be back now at any moment. He looked at the fire. It was almost out. At the milk-crock. The lid was off, the dresser was white, telling of the depredations of the cat. And Cassie Shemus Meehal was outside!

There are moments when fear gives way to recklessness. Such a moment had come to Mr. Brogan. He put his hands in his pockets, assumed an aggressive pose and looked at the window.

"Let her come!" he said, but not daring to raise his voice above a whisper, "and I'll show Cassie Shemus Meehal that I'm not as big a plaisham as she makes me out to be!"

The window had no blind. Through it the man could see the moon big and white heaving itself over the hill of

Crinnan. And with the moon, but nearer, in fact, outside the window-pane, a hand rose, closed all fingers save one, and with this beckoned to Mr. Brogan. The man shuddered, and a cold shiver ran through every member of his body, while the solitary finger outside the window-pane kept beckoning, beckoning.

"An omen of danger!" Eamon gasped. "A portent of evil!"

The hand disappeared, but something rose to take its place, rose slowly, and Eamon gazed spellbound. First came into view a shock of hair standing out in several ways, every tuft working, as it seemed, on wires and performing a fantastic dance against the background of the moon. Under this distortion of hair was a pallid brow, and set at the base of the brow was a pair of eyes, which to Eamon's distorted imagination burned like two sparks from the flames of hell. The finger rose again and beckoned. The apparition wanted Mr. Brogan.

"It's Columb Ruagh!" gasped Eamon. "Now what will he be wantin' me for?"

Columb disappeared, and Mr. Brogan with one hasty rush put the lid on the crock, gave the milk-strewn dresser a rub with the dishcloth, and threw half a dozen turf on the fire. Then he went out.

At the angle formed where a stack of turf rested on the end wall of the house, something moved.

"Hi!" hissed a voice.

Eamon went towards the figure, which moved away as the householder neared it. In this manner, without a word, the two men proceeded until two-hundred yards separated them from the house, Columb Ruagh in front and Eamon na Sgaddan in rear. Suddenly the leading man stopped, placed a burden which he carried on the ground and lay down beside it. Eamon reached him and also stopped. He looked down at the red-haired man, who, flat on his back, was stroking his mustache with a slow, methodical hand.

"Sit down on yer bottom, Eamon," he said in a low,

impressive voice. "'Sit down and listen till I tell ye somethin'."

"But it's too cold to sit out here when there's a good fire to sit at in the house below," said Eamon. "It's yer death iv cold that ye'll be gettin' out here."

"Sit down," said Columb, "beside me, and the sucker that I bought at the fair the day."

Eamon still stood irresolute, his eyes fixed on Columb.

"It's the death iv cold that ye'll be gettin', Mr. Keeran," he repeated.

"Sit down, Eamon," Columb insisted in a hoarse whisper. "It's for yer own good, mind, what I'm goin' to say to ye. All's fair and above board between us two, Eamon! Ye know that. We've traveled beyont the water and we know what's what, as well as the measure iv one another. We're business men, Eamon na Sgaddan—or if ye like, Mr. Brogan. So get down on yer bottom be the side iv me and listen to what I've to say."

Eamon sat down without a word.

"Listen to me," began Columb in an affable tone, though it was evident to Eamon that something vaguely threatening lurked under the quiet, lazy voice. "I came along here the night just to see ye and have it out about somethin' with ye. What that somethin' is, I'll tell ye in a minit. But first, Eamon, I want to ask ye a question. It's a straight question, and knowin' yerself as I do I'm sure that ye'll give a straight answer. The question's this, Eamon. Do ye know me for what I am? No, wait a minit"—this as Eamon gave a preliminary cough before replying—"wait a minit till I explain meself fully. I'm not sayin' that ye don't know what I mane. Not that, Eamon, but what I mane is this. I'm no hand at speakin'. I can never make meself understood like a scholar, for I haven't the learnin'. It takes me a week to say what ye could get yer tongue round in two words. That's it. I'm a rough mountainy man without the learnin'. Listen. This is what I mane, Eamon, when I ask ye 'Do ye know me for what I am?' It's like this. I'm a man that keeps to himself away up there at the Crinnan cross-roads doin'

my best to make ends meet, what with one thing and another. But it's a hard job that, I'm tellin' ye, and I'm a poor man, Eamon, a poor man. Ye believe that, Eamon, don't ye?"

"I suppose I do," Eamon assented weakly, though thinking otherwise.

"I'm also a man that people would think tight-fisted and hard," Columb continued. "But it's not the case at all. I'm a man with the ready hand when I see a person in trouble. Give me a chance to do a good turn and I'll do it. That's me, Eamon na Sgad—— Mr. Brogan, I mane. . . . Even the day when I was comin' back from the fair I saw them two stirks iv Sally Rourke's on the mortgaged land, and it's not the first time that I saw them there either. What did I do, Eamon, Mr. Brogan, I mane? This, and nothin' else. I went up to her house and there she was there havin' her shin-heat be the fire. And says I to her, 'Them two stirks iv yers, Sally, Sprikkles and Branny, are up on the mortgaged land, it that used to belong to Kathleen O'Malley, God rest her! at one time and now belongs to me on account iv the twenty gold sovereigns that I gave her when she was hard up with the back iv every one's hand to her. Them two stirks iv yer own are the divils for grass that's sweet, Sally,' says I. But that was me fun, and Sally is always slow to take offense when I'm spakin' to her. Sally, if not another person in the parish, knows me for what I am. It's her that has the good hearty word for me whenever she meets me at Mass or Market. That's Sally!

" 'Yes, they're two rascally vagabones, them same stirks,' says she. 'I'm after them when I can, but an ould woman like me hasn't the legs iv a young girsha. It's short iv wind that I am now at the heel iv the day,' says she. 'But that and all, I'm not the woman to let me cattle bastes graze on a neighbor when there's life in me body.'

" 'That I know, Sally Rourke,' says I. 'And that's why I came in to see ye. I didn't want ye, and ye so on in years and at the shut iv day, too, to wander over the

hill and keep on the tail iv them two stirks. Don't pay any heed to them the night, Sally,' says I, just like that. 'There's grass and enough on the mortgaged land, and the two stirks can have as much as they want iv it. It's a hard-hearted man, Sally,' says I, 'that would have ye runnin' after young stirks after what ye have done for the people iv the Glen. 'Twas yerself always was the one to go to with all complaints from a sprained finger to a broken back.' That's what I said, Eamon, that and more to the same tune was what crossed me mouth. To think that I'd have the poor ould woman runnin' after the stirks through the hills in the black iv night went against the grain iv me, for I thought as anybody else with a grain iv commonsense would have thought. Isn't Sally the first woman to hand when a soul enters the world? Sally at the beginnin' and the priest at the end! But if Sally hadn't done her job at the beginnin' and done it well there's no job for the priest at the finish. Amn't I talkin' sense, Eamon, answer me now?"

"Of course ye're talkin' sense, as you always do," said Eamon with a slight shiver as if the cold night air was chilling him.

"But it's gettin' cold that ye are here, sittin' down on the wet stubble and the rain not dried out iv it yet," said Columb in a tone of concern, looking at the man who was now lying on the ground beside him. "Ye shouldn't have come out without yer coat, and a muffler, too, for there's a nip in the weather. May's always a month that can't be trusted."

"No, it never can be trusted," said Eamon in a relieved voice as he got to his feet and shook himself. "I'll just get down to the house and have a heat be the fire, and ye'll come down too and have a sup iv tay afore ye go up the road to Crinnan. It's a long step in front iv ye, Mr. Keeran. But for all that a man gets warm on his feet when he's shakin' them. And if ye're not comin' down with me to have a sup iv tay, I'll just walk with ye to the road and see ye on yer way safe."

"But I haven't said 'No' to goin' down with ye to have

a drop iv tay, Eamon," said Columb, turning slowly on his side, placing his elbow in the ground and resting his face in the cup of his hand. "I haven't said 'No' to it, but I'm not goin' down there, thankin' ye for yer invitation all the same. I would like to go, but I'm a poor man, Eamon, and there's so much for me to do up at home that I haven't the time to spend down here. It's a bad wicked world when ye come to think iv it. Ye've to scringe and rake and scrape from one year's end to the other, and no matter how hard ye scrape and save ye're as poor on it at Hall'eve as ye were on Candlemas Day."

He now spoke slowly and laboriously as if the weariness of making money had crept into his tongue. Eamon walked backwards a pace, rubbed the toe of his boot against the ground and sighed.

"It's a hard world, Mr. Keeran," he said.

"For some iv us," said Columb, "but not for all. The hand of God is heavy on some iv us and the hand iv man heavy on others. And on some the hand iv God and man is heavy. And I know one that's sufferin' in that way, a poor soul that hasn't a friend in the world and as far as the look iv things go not a friend in heaven. D'ye know who I'm meaning, Mr. Brogan? You're a man and a scholar and one that's quick to get the hinge of things. Now d'ye know who I mane?"

"I don't know, Columb," said Eamon in a whisper.

"Well, that's strange," Columb continued mercilessly. "It's a neighbor iv yers. Now d'ye know?"

"Not Sally Rourke?" asked Eamon in an agitated whisper. Though deep down in his heart he knew that Columb was not referring to Sally Rourke, he had still a flimsy hope that it might be Sally.

"No, it's not her," said Columb in an oily voice. "Poor Sally has her sorrows, as I've said, but still she has heart to be sorry for a neighbor that's worse off nor herself. A young neighbor, too, at that. Now d'ye know who it is?"

Eamon sank down on both knees, holding one hand in the other and fixed a piteous look on Columb Ruagh.

"I don't know what ye mane," he said. "Tell me who it is, Columb? Tell me! Tell me!"

"Ye look feeard, Mr. Brogan," said Columb, in a tone which seemed charged with mock sympathy. "Or is it sick that ye are gettin' with the cold! Ye're white, too. Are ye feeard iv somethin', Mr. Brogan?"

"Oh! I'm all right," said Eamon with a hollow laugh, getting to his feet again. "But tell me who ye mane."

"Tell you who I mane," said Columb, and there was something almost caustic in his voice. "Well, I will that, but it's funny that it's yerself iv all men that doesn't know who I mane. Everybody else knows, every one to the butt iv the barony and beyond. Every one knows the one that I'm talkin' about and every one's sayin' this and that, one thing worse than the other. It's funny the way that people talk about things that is no consarn iv their own. Isn't it now, Mr. Brogan?"

He looked at Eamon. In the moonlight he could see the brows of the poor man contract as if he were on the point of undertaking something wild and reckless. All this seemed to give Columb a cruel pleasure. His policy of wearing the man down seemed to be on the point of working its purpose, whatever that purpose was. Eamon coughed, opened his mouth as if on the point of speaking, then closed his mouth again.

"People are never happy unless they're talkin' iv things that's no consarn iv their own," Columb urged. "I'm talkin' the truth, amn't I, Mr. Brogan?"

"It's a true word," Eamon acquiesced lamely.

"True as Gospel," Columb went on, casually, it being yet his pleasure to give with catlike grace his mouse a few seconds of perilous freedom. "And it's the way iv the world since the start iv time. Some people are such spawn that they are never happy unless they're talkin' scandal and runnin' down their neighbors. I can't stand people iv that get, Columb, but that and all what can I do? Nothin' at all. I'm one man against the whole world when I stand up for people that's down. The only person that I've met to look eye to eye with me is Sally Rourke, and

when she sees a neighbor worse off nor herself she's ready to lend her a helpin' hand. Lend *her,* I said, and I didn't mean to. But now that I've said *her* I will stick to it. It's a woman that the people are talkin' about, Mr. Brogan. It is for a woman that Sally Rourke has the kind word, and I, meself, poor as I am, had the ready hand when I saw the poverty that she was in. Now ye do know who it is that I am manin', Mr. Brogan?"

The claw was stretched out and the mouse drawn in again.

"Maureen O'Malley that ye are manin', is it?" Eamon asked in a thick whisper, looking full in Columb's face as if the eyes of the red-haired man fascinated him.

"Maureen O'Malley," said Columb quietly, with the calm, easy, horrible composure of a Grand Inquisitor turning the lever of the thumbscrew. "That is the girl, her that's left her lone on the world now with not a soul to take care iv her! Her poor mother dead, killed be want, sufferin', and be the man that was guilty iv her sin and then left her to herself when she got into trouble. Who the man is doesn't matter now. Whoever he is and whatever he is, there's one thing certain about him. He owes every penny in his hands to help that girl, Maureen Malley. If he was too big a vagabone to give the girl his name it's as little as he can do to give the girl his money. Me, for example, me that's supposed to be a rough mountainy gulpin', without a word iv learnin' in me head, look at me! I met the poor girl on the road the day and without a word, when I saw the tears comin' from her eyes and runnin' down her cheeks, I put me hand in me pocket and gave her out twenty gold pounds and says: 'Get yerself somethin' for that, Maureen, and don't cry.' That's what I said to the girl, Mr. Brogan, and that's the money that I gave to her and me a poor man too. And I gave it to her, not the same as charity, but as if I was drivin' a hard bargain with her. I pretended that I wanted a piece iv land, her share iv the hill iv Crinnan, the rest iv the hill belonging to yerself and Cassie Shemus Meehal, Mr. Brogan."

He paused and kept silent for a moment.

"And for that bit iv the hill, that would never be any good to her, for she hasn't the money to stock it, I gave her twenty pounds in gold," he went on. "Twenty pounds, Mr. Brogan, and me a poor man, too. But I couldn't see her goin' round on her lone in her sorrow with maybe hardly a bite to ate from the shriek iv dawn to the shut iv day. Now, Mr. Brogan, don't ye think"—Columb got to his feet and came close to Eamon, who for the past five minutes kept his eyes obstinately fixed on the toe of his boot—"don't ye think that I did the right thing to the poor girsha?"

"Ye did the right thing," Eamon answered.

"And I wasn't the man to blame in the beginnin', was I?" Columb persisted.

"I don't know what ye're manin', Columb," said Eamon in a voice of anguish.

"Well, I'll explain," said Columb, taking his pipe from the pocket of his coat and putting it in his mouth. "I'll explain what's in my head, though I'm a stupid man and not as deep as a scholar. I never was at school. I didn't even meet the scholars. In a word, Mr. Brogan, I'm mountainy and thick as mud. But for all that I never did anything dirty when it came to a woman. I always kept meself respectable and dacent. That's me, Mr. Brogan, that's old Columb for ye. There's not a one in the barony that can cast anything up in me face. If they could they'd do it, for it's not in the get iv any one to make it easy for a person that makes a slip. If I was the one to blame in the beginnin', if I was the one to go home with Kathleen Malley from the dance in Neddy Og's seventeen years gone last Candlemas I'd never hear the end iv it. Would I, do ye think, Mr. Brogan?"

"I don't know," said Eamon in a whisper.

"Well, I don't think I would and I wouldn't desarve to if I treated Kathleen O'Malley, God rest her! as she was treated in her life with the back iv the hand to her whenever she went out to Mass or Market. Why didn't the man that was the one to blame step forward and give his name

to her and her wean and make her right in the eyes iv the world and the eyes iv God? Why didn't he now? I put it to yerself, why didn't he, if he was a man with heart and spirit? If he wasn't the dirty spawn that he was, why didn't he? Why didn't he, Mr. Brogan? Why didn't he?''

Although up till now Eamon had felt the cold and shivered as if the night air was chilling him, he suddenly became hot, stifling. A wave of warm blood charged his body, his face and head, and throbbed at his temple veins as if it would burst the bounds which confined it. He spluttered as if something caught in his throat, coughed, swallowed, spat, then rubbed his hand across his forehead and gave forth a few unintelligible sounds.

''Don't take it so hard,'' said Columb. ''Take it easy, Eamon. It's all right.''

''Why didn't he, you ask, Mr. Keeran? Why didn't he?'' said poor Eamon in a half-strangled whisper.

''That's the question,'' said Columb excitedly. ''Why didn't he?''

''Because,'' said Eamon, his head bent to the ground, his arms hanging limply.

''Because what?'' Columb urged.

''Because,'' said Eamon, straightening himself with a jerk and catching the neck of his waistcoat with both hands as if baring his breast to receive the arrows of adverse fortune, ''because he was married on Cassie Shemus Meehal.''

V

The house was in complete darkness. Not a sound issued from the dense obscurity as Mr. Brogan crossed the threshold with suspended breath and timorous footfall. In the blackness of the interior a perfect hush reigned, the hush of a block of gun-cotton before the spark is applied. Though outside the moon shone with its silvery gleam, the blind on the window, drawn tight by Cassie Shemus Meehal, refused to let one ray enter the room. Unable to see

the woman in the darkness, Mr. Brogan was yet conscious of a hostile presence and susceptible to properties which though hidden seemed to possess dynamic energy, omnipotent though unseen. He shuddered, but bracing himself he went towards the window and groped for something on the sill.

Striking a match he turned up the wick of the paraffin lamp and lit it. Then turning round he looked at the bed. His wife lay there, her knees curled up and her eyes fixed on the man. Everything else was just as he left it when he went out, with the exception of the fire and the bed. The first was raked, the second occupied. Cassie Shemus Meehal sat up in bed.

"Well, you're back again," she said in a quiet voice. This was a preliminary, something that could not be gainsaid. She usually began in this manner, husbanding her resources judiciously at the start, knowing that she would need them all before she came to the end of her usual flush of vituperative abuse.

Eamon, contrary to his custom, did not answer, nor make excuses for his delinquency. Instead, he reached his arm up to the lip of the wall where the roof-beam rested, groped under the scraws and brought therefrom a razor case. Taking out the razor he commenced sharpening it on a hone. This action of Eamon having no precedent somewhat discomfited the woman.

"What are ye goin' to do?" she asked.

Eamon, busy with hone and razor, made no answer.

"Is it deaf that ye are?" she shrieked. "Do ye not hear what I'm sayin' to ye?"

Mr. Brogan, with imperturbable rear—his back was towards Cassie Shemus Meehal, his face on his hone—continued sharpening the razor.

"Don't ye hear me!" she yelled. "Or d'ye not! Burnin' all the oil as well as everything else," she added, clutching at a side issue as she floundered from the straight path of original intention.

Eamon turned round, coolly thrust up his sleeves, and with razor in hand came towards the bed, stood there, an

air of profound mystery settling on his face. Never had Cassie seen Mr. Brogan behave in this way before. He was not like other men, of course, and a man who is not like other men might be guilty of any action of which ordinary men in their ordinary senses are not capable. She looked at the door, then at her husband. He was now giving a finishing touch to the razor edge by rubbing it along his forearm.

"Goin' to shave is it that ye are, Eamon?" she asked, in a voice of astonishment, suddenly becoming conscious of something not altogether in keeping with ordinary behavior in the action of her man.

"Maybe aye and maybe no," Eamon replied in a gruff voice. "The razor is an implement that can be used for more than one purpose."

"Mother iv God, what do ye mane, Eamon?" shrieked the woman, and the shriek had a quality which he had never heard before in the shriek of Cassie Shemus Meehal. "Under God the day and the night what's it that ye're up to with the razor?"

"It's the best-tempered steel, and it would slit a throat as easy as 'twould slit a new turf," said Eamon meditatively, as if talking to himself, but to the woman trembling on the bed the words were fraught with horrible significance.

She stared at him, with wide-open eyes, a queer shivery sensation in her spine, a strange troubled thought running through her mind. Eamon na Sgaddan was going mad.

"I was always the good wife to ye, Eamon," said Cassie, at that moment recollecting that mad men may be easily led away from their purpose by a very slight suggestion. "Always the good wife to ye I was, Eamon, wasn't I?"

"Aye," Eamon acquiesced doubtfully as if the monosyllable were open to great question. A cold sweat oozed out on the woman's forehead. Eamon had changed his position and was now between her and the door.

"A good woman t'ye, Eamon," she went on wildly. "Summer and winter I was on me feet at the earliest minit in the mornin', gettin' things ready in order that ye

wouldn't have a hard day iv it when ye got up yerself. Now don't ye think so yerself that I was the good woman t'ye?''

''Maybe,'' said Eamon with an almost vicious sweep of the razor down his hairy wrist.

''And the way that I used to make the tay for ye and give it t'ye in the bed,'' she went on. The storm of emotion in her brain disturbed the sediment of half-forgotten memories and threw them to the surface as a flood tears at the fabric of an ancient river-bed and whirls its parts, portions and pieces up to the light of day. ''And ye mind the way that I used to take it t'ye, Eamon,'' she pleaded, ''and it piping hot in the mornin'.''

''I mind it well,'' Eamon admitted grimly. ''Three times you done it, after the marriage seventeen years ago.''

Another remembrance from the heel-tap of the past surged up in Cassie's mind. People who go mad show a preference to attack whose whom they love best. ''And it is the wrong thing that I'm doin','' she stammered to herself in a whisper.

''I wasn't a good wife to ye at all, Eamon,'' she shouted, hastening to retrieve her past blunders. ''I never treated ye as a man ought to be treated. Don't forget that, mind.''

''I'll not,'' said Eamon, testing the temper of the steel with his thumb. ''No fear iv me letting that out iv me mind.''

''And what is that ye're manin' to do at all?'' she gasped, feeling herself in the position of one who has changed rooms in a burning house. Eamon looked at her; then as if the razor had not passed its test he recommenced sharpening it on his forearm. In fact he was now feeling terrified himself. The position in which he found himself was so novel, so unprecedented in the history of his marital relations that he felt he could not endure it much longer. Cassie Shemus Meehal was terrified, and Mr. Brogan was at a loss as to how he could take advantage of this terror. But something had to be done, something drastic.

He stopped rubbing the weapon and, holding it by the haft, he looked at the woman in the bed.

"I'm desperate," he blurted out, setting his teeth. "I'm a man that has never had his way, but from now forrit I'm goin' to have it! I've seen the way that business has been carried on here by you, Cassie Shemus Meehal, and I don't approve of it! From now on I'm goin' to be master here myself and no one else!"

"Iv course, Eamon, iv course," said the woman soothingly, with a sigh of relief.

"All right, all right!" he said, waving his razor in the air as if the woman's approval of his changed views was a matter of no consequence. "I've begun the night to show that I'm master here. The night I've sold that bit iv land up be the Crinnan cross-roads to Columb Ruagh Keeran, and what I've got for it doesn't matter to anybody bar meself."

"Iv course, Eamon, iv course," said the woman. "Ye're master here and nobody can gainsay that."

"Now make iv that whatever ye like," he said aggressively, looking at his wife. He had not heard what she said; he did not want to hear it. One word from Cassie, if listened to, might break down the whole wall of his resolve and determination. In fact, Mr. Brogan was almost on the point of collapse. "Make iv that whatever ye like!" he cried. "And I don't care a damn what ye think iv it."

He shut his razor, went with a steady step to the table, turned down the wick and blew out the light. Then he undressed and went into the bed beside Cassie Shemus Meehal.

FAIRIES

Meenahalla bedding and grass,
Butter and milk in Inishmool,
And big the pastures in Ardnaglass
That hasn't its equal in sheep and wool—
There are seven corners in Donegal,
And acres many, meadow and moor;
Rich in money, but that and all,
The folk of the Rosses are very poor.

The guinea coin is the butt of care
And hearts are heavy for hands that hold,
But the Rosses people, and they be bare,
Have neither their hearts in gear nor gold—
And it's all of them always for song and fun,
First to frolic at dance and spree
With nimble toes when the day is done,
In Carrandooragh and Meenaree.

And they take the gifts from the mill and churn
And the mallard wor on the Rosses bog
To the gentle oak by the Dooran burn
For the little people from Tir nan Og,
Who come with the dusk their gifts to find
In the sacred ring by the haunted oak,
And they weave a spell over souls so kind,
So the Rosses people are happy folk.

CHAPTER V

Mrs. Thornton

I

IT was the early morning and raining heavily. The greening sycamore and ash dripped sullenly, spattering the camber of the roadway with their heavy tears. The drains on either side of the highway were riding their boundaries and spilling their overflow on the holms, where the lush grass thickened in its far-flung carpet of nascent green. In the wet and early morning of May the country presented a cheerless face to the leaden sky. All things seemed to droop despondently, the drooping clouds, the drooping hedgerows and drooping grasses. The few pedestrians on the roadway seemed to take tone from the general character of the day. They bent their heads and drooped as if following the funeral of a friend.

Along this road, with Strabane in front showing through the rain in outline vague, in aspect forbidding, came Maureen O'Malley, a lone and solitary figure, plaintive and penniless. In the far distance the hills of her native Donegal rose to the sky, dismal and gloomy. Foot-weary and spiritless she trudged on her way barefooted, her boots hanging over her shoulder, a little checked bundle under her arm.

Round her head, hiding her ears and covering her hair so completely that not one lock showed, was a red kerchief, wringing wet. The girl's features were pinched and drawn, the cheeks hollow, and the eyes, joyless and tired, sunk deep in their pockets as if, becoming weary of the drear perspective, they had withdrawn to die. Over her shoulders under the boots hung her gray shawl. From its

drooping tassels seeped the rain to the petticoat and from the petticoat it fell on her legs and streaked its way to the road.

Since the night before last when she left home, she had traveled some fifty miles. When Eileen Conroy left her, Maureen packed her little personal belongings in a bundle, turned down the light as if she were going to bed and took the road that led beyond the mountains. The night was very clear and the highway deserted so that she met nobody on the earlier part of her journey. A league from Meenaroodagh she sat down by the roadside, took off her boots, which pinched her feet, and strapped them over her shoulder. Ever since then she had walked barefooted.

Shortly after daybreak with the marches of Dungarrow long past and the hill of Crinnan well to the rear, the girl encountered a woman driving two milch cows to their pasturage. The woman was very old, her hair snowy white and her face lined with wrinkles. Like Maureen she was barefooted.

"The blessing of God be on you, decent girl," she said in Irish, and stopping, fixed a pair of kindly eyes on Maureen. "And where are you off to so early in the day?"

"To the fair of Strabane," said Maureen.

"And going all the way on your feet?" inquired the woman.

"All the way," Maureen replied.

"It's a long journey in front of you," said the woman with the cows. "And where are you from?"

"Dungarrow."

"A kindly arm of the world," said the woman. "And what do they call you?"

"Maureen O'Malley."

"A good name that. And is your father and mother living?"

In this manner the conversation proceeded for a full ten minutes, Maureen answering questions, the old woman giving an opinion on the substance and essence of the girl's reply as a preliminary to a further interrogation.

"Well, I must get on my way," said Maureen when the inquisition became tedious.

"Have you had your breakfast then?" asked the old woman.

"No, indeed," was Maureen's answer.

"And you have no money?"

"None."

"Listen then," said the woman with the readiness of one who seemed to have spent all her life in doing acts of kindness to Donegal girls on the way to the hiring-fair of Strabane. "I'll leave the cows here. The two are as quiet as lambs, and one of them, the brindled one, had twins at the last calving. And such fine calves, but one of them died because he had the evil eye put on him and it was only two days old at the time. I tried to put it away with Doon Well water, but the spell was too strong on the poor little dear when we noticed it, and it was too late. But the cows are quiet, Maureen O'Malley, with no roving in their legs, so I'll leave them here to graze by the road, and I'll come back with you and give you a good bowl of tea."

Holding Maureen by the hand, the old woman turned and accompanied the girl along the road till they reached a snug thatched cottage that stood by the roadside under a sycamore tree. Through the open door a fire could be seen blazing on the hearth. The two women entered.

"Sit down on the chair and warm your wee feet," said the hostess. "And I'll get the kettle ready."

Breakfast was prepared, bread and fresh butter spread thickly, and two eggs. Maureen drew her chair in to the table and found to her surprise that she was very hungry.

"A thousand thanks to you," she said, getting up when she had finished and addressing the old woman, whose eyes appeared to have grown brighter at every mouthful that Maureen had eaten. This hospitality, while being sustenance to the chance guest, seemed to bring renewed vitality to the eyes of the old woman.

"But you have eaten nothing," said the woman with a

gesture of disapproval. "Two eggs only, and there are two more in the pandy on the fire boiling for you."

"It's the first time I ever ate two eggs together," said Maureen. "Thanks again very much."

"Arrah, don't thank me," said the woman. "Thank God, decent girl, that has given me the power to give you a bit of a meal—and it was a bit, Maureen. A sparrow would have eaten more for its collation."

Maureen raised the bundle from the floor and put it under her arm prior to taking her departure.

"It's a long journey," said the old woman with a sigh, taking down a scapular which hung from a nail over the fireplace. "But if it has to be done it has to be done, and God be with you all the way. And here, take this scapular with you and it will be luck to you. The girl that wore this had the same cut as yourself and the same laughing eyes. Your eyes look tired now, Maureen O'Malley, with the thought of the journey in your head, but I know that at the heel of a day at home when you sit down at a dance you can laugh with the best of them and make a joke with a ready tongue. My girl, God rest her! was like that."

"Is she dead?" asked Maureen in a tone of pity.

"Two years gone, last Christmas," said the woman, tears showing in her eyes. "A cold in the chest and a cough, and she went from me like a spark that goes up in the air. And this is hers, but now you take it and put it round your neck and you are sure to have the prayer of an angel on you all the years of your life."

She handed Maureen the scapular. The girl kissed it, put it round her neck, while tears welled from her tired eyes.

"And take this with you, too," said the woman, handing Maureen a red handkerchief in which were stored the two boiled eggs and several slices of bread and butter. "Just sit down be the road when the hunger comes on you and say a prayer for yourself and for all that's in misery and make a meal. And God and Mary watch over you and keep you safe all the days of your life. *Beannacht leat,* Maureen. *Beannacht leat!*"

All day long Maureen traveled, but now and again pausing for a moment to take a nibble from the store in the handkerchief. A certain moral fortitude filled her being since she met the old woman, and this, brightening her mental outlook, went a long way towards easing the physical strain of the journey. In addition to this happy incident, the day was bright and warm, the air filled with the scent of early flowers. Walking barefooted was conducive to a certain dreamy languor in no way impaired by the effort of walking.

Removed in space from the scenes of her unhappy childhood and in time from the calamity which had so recently overtaken her, the joy of the first went some way towards the abrogation of the second, and Maureen was in a measure happy. The kindly act which blest the morning helped in a way to dissipate the vague fear of the preceding night. The uneasy feeling with which she contemplated the journey threading the somber web of a more defined grief left no room for the slightest thread of hope to inweave itself into the fabric.

But the most checkered weather has its gleams and tinges of brightness and the dreariest life its moments of happiness. Though nipped sorely by the pincers of adverse fortune and circumstance, youth, strong-blooded and vital, is quick to renew itself. So with Maureen O'Malley. On the dry road, now bathed with the sun and heartened by singing birds from broom and bramble, she felt in high spirits, which, when she paused a moment to analyze them, seemed to her as something very wrong and mean.

"And my mother, God rest her, dead," she whispered accusingly as if to damp her mood. But even this whispered reproof served no purpose. A moment following utterance, thoughts of her mother left her mind, and she found herself thinking of Cathal Cassidy, his declaration of love.

But always on the fringe of this remembrance the form of her mother, white and ghostly, showed itself holding a finger in air, as if to remind Maureen that she was doing something wrong in thinking of the man that loved her.

Maureen recalled her mother's injunction given many a time as the two sat by the home fire, Kathleen knitting a stocking while the daughter read a book, or built castles of wonder with turf for walls, a dishcloth for roof and a streak of red ashes for the road which a fairy prince would take when coming to free the imprisoned princess from the toils of the giant who had imprisoned her in a dark dungeon.

"When you grow up and be a woman and a man maybe comes and asks you to be married on him," the mother would say, "see that he's not a man of this parish or the parish next it on either side. You must be married on a man out of the parish if ever you marry at all. That's if you want to be happy and if you want the man to be happy as well. Mind that, Maureen, my wee dear," she would say, catching the girl in her arms and kissing her. "It's for your own good, mind, for your own good, my wee flower of the world."

But Maureen did not understand the mother's meaning then, did not understand it even when her prince took on the form and appointments of Cathal Cassidy, when the prancing steed became a cart horse and the glittering spear became the ash-hafted whip which Cathal used in driving. The prince who rescued her from a castle of dreams at ten and carried her away to the land of Tir Nan Og on his spirited steed, was the same prince who met her going to Mass on Sunday when she was seventeen and carried her away to another land where youth is eternal and where Love holds sway over the hearts of the young.

Into this mysterious realm with love as yet unspoken but felt, where thoughts communicated, where silence had tangible properties, and where an ordinary greeting breathed the romance of the world, the girl was wafted. Then came a day when her prince spoke to her, saying, "You are mine for ever and always."

This happened a moment ago and was happening now, for Maureen on her journey to Strabane was living it all over again. Exiled from her Fairyland, she bore its aroma still in her heart. As she walked she could feel the arms

of her prince circle her shoulder, his lips rest on her hair and his voice whisper of love in her ear. Cathal loved her with all the strength of his heart; he would tumble the world down for her sake; he was her Fairy Prince come to real life.

But as she thought of him she recalled her mother alive, who had warned her against him, and her mother dead, who had come, even as he told his love, to remind her of the advice so often given when Maureen was a little child when impressions dint the young, malleable mind and become part of it, like faith that always remains either in acceptance or negation.

Now, however, removed from temptation, she could think of Cathal, for in that there was nothing wrong, nothing at variance with a promise once given to her mother. She would not be Cathal's wife, she had renounced him on principle, in accordance with the tenets of one who was gone. But the moment of impassioned love came back upon her with all its cruel charm, and Maureen felt that she had cast away something dear and precious from her life.

Was it right or was it wrong? She could not tell, but as she puzzled over it she could not help feeling that something had left her and vanished without any prospect of returning. A strange weakness overtook the girl as she thought of this. Her legs gave way under her, and she sat down by the roadside while tears of anguish, bitter as gall, welled up in her eyes.

That night Maureen stole into a barn by the roadside, lay down in the hay and fell asleep. In the morning at four when she awoke it was raining, a heavy rain that made every wheel-wound on the road a ditch, every holm a lake, and every brook a torrent. The girl was well out of the mountainy district now, into the flat lands where no hill rose to shelter a warm glen and where the horizon stretched away into drear immeasurable distances. Here the very houses had a more austere look than any she had ever known in Dungarrow. They were cold, proud, self-centered and forbidding. The whole environment was tinged with something hard and austere, such as might

sadden the merriest heart and intensify the gloom of a soul already steeped in anguish.

Maureen shuddered whenever she looked at the smug slated houses that seemed to draw themselves up with a distant, friendless shrug as she looked at them. They were decidedly hostile and supercilious, cold as if no cheerful fire ever burned on a hearth within, forbidding as if their doors never opened in welcome to a soul, pitiless even as if their people never were guilty of charity or benevolence.

II

At nine o'clock, with Strabane in the near distance and the rain pelting pitilessly on her sodden garments, Maureen sat down by the roadside and put on her boots. The road was now thick with the country people on their way to the fair. All were converging on one point, the gloomy town of Strabane, farmers in their dainty gigs coming to hire hands for the ensuing six months, boys and girls with a term of service at an end hastening to undertake another six months' work that would be in effect similar, but in location different. It was the twelfth of May in Strabane, the day on which gold changed hands as the return for a past six months' stewardship and silver given as earnest of a bargain newly made.

Maureen, having laced her boots, got to her feet and was on the point of setting off when some one shouted behind her. She looked back to see a jaunting car approaching, a swarthy man, portly of paunch, on one side holding the reins, and on the other side an elderly woman gripping the rail of the dickey with the object of steadying herself on the seat as the car oscillated on the rough, uneven causeway. It was the man who shouted.

"Hi! Donegal!" he called.

Maureen, realizing that he was addressing her, stopped and when he came abreast he brought his horse to a standstill.

"Goin' to the fair?" he inquired in a gruff voice.

"I'm going to the fair," said Maureen.

"Goin' to hire yerself out?" he asked.

"That I am," said Maureen.

"Yes," said the man, stroking his beard and spitting on the roadway. "Yes, yes. And what money are you after?"

Maureen, who dwelt practically alone when at home and who knew very little of transactions between master and servant, was at a loss as to what answer she should give. She once heard a neighboring girl back from service beyond the mountains tell that her wages for six months were six pounds ten shillings. Probably if she asked for the same wage it would be given.

"Six pound ten," she replied, looking at the man.

"For a year?" he asked and gave vent to a sarcastic whistle. Then he looked at the woman. "Did you hear that?" he said. "Six pound ten!"

"I'm not deaf," said the woman with a snort, evidently intended for Maureen. "Drive on."

The man gave the horse a flick with his whip; the animal trotted off, but when a hundred yards separated the two from the girl the vehicle stopped again and waited till Maureen overtook it.

"Six pounds ten, you're wantin'?" the man inquired, turning round on his seat and looking at Maureen. Then without waiting for an answer he continued: "It's big money for a girl your cut, and you'll never get it, either here or in the fair. Where are you from, anyway?" he asked, as if knowledge of the girl's native place would in some manner explain why she dared to ask eight pence half penny a day as wages.

"Dungarrow," said Maureen.

"Saw some Dungarrow cubs," said the man with a sniff. "Fill their pockets with money and their bellies with spuds and they're the best cubs in the world. But put them in front of a day's work and they love it so much that they'll lie beside it and look at it. I suppose the girls are not a bit better. What can you do?"

"Can you nurse weans?" asked the woman, before Maureen had time to reply to the man's question.

"I never had to do that," said the girl. "But I'll try and do my best."

"Do you know what weans are fed on?" asked the woman.

"Milk if they're very wee," said the girl. "And when they get bigger—"

"That's enough to know about them," said the woman. "If I take you on I'll learn you the rest, that's if you're willin' to learn. I love weans and I give them no end iv care. But I've my own opinions iv the way to bring them up. A wean must be treated kindly, but not too kindly. If they're made to live too soft on it at the start they're never any good when they grow up. Now isn't that your own opinion, Donegal?"

"It is," said Maureen in a puzzled voice. Though not knowing what interpretation to place on the woman's theories of child-rearing, she wanted to make herself agreeable.

"Any people sib to you comin' to the fair the day?" asked the man, leaning across the dickey.

"I haven't any one sib to me," said the girl.

"Not a brother or sister?"

"I haven't any."

"And your father and mother?" inquired the man, fixing a knowing look on his woman friend.

"They're dead," said Maureen, tears coming to her eyes.

"You're all on your own, then?" asked the woman.

"Yes, I'm all on my lone," Maureen replied.

"And does any one know that you're here?" asked the woman, exchanging glances with the swarthy man.

"No one as far as I can tell," Maureen said. "I stole away."

"Not from the place that you were hired in?" asked the man in a voice tinged with suspicion. "You didn't run away from your place as lots of the Dungarrow cubs do with money that's not their own in their pocket?"

"I'm not a thief, if that's what you mean," said Mau-

reen, straightening her shoulders and taking a step forward as if to continue her journey.

"He doesn't mean that," said the woman in conciliatory voice. "It's only his fun. But at bottom he's a right good fellow."

" 'Twas only my fun," the man hastened to confirm. "I don't mean what I say most of the time. And your money," he added. "What was it, now?"

"Six pounds ten," said the girl.

"Six pounds ten," said the woman deprecatingly. "A big lot that."

"You'll not be able to get five pounds at the fair if you're there," said the man. "Now what do you say to," —he cleared his throat—"to five pounds?" He stretched the last two words as if endeavoring to make the girl realize what five whole pounds really meant.

"I'm goin' to the fair afore I'd hire with any man for five pounds," said Maureen in an emphatic voice.

"Well, five pound five," said the woman, implying by her tones that she would pay that wage at a pinch, but never go a penny beyond it.

"Five pound five," said the driver in the tone of a man who had really nothing to do with the business but was surprised at the generosity of the woman.

"And you will have the will of the table that I sit at meself," said the woman.

"Just think of that," said the man, his astonishment at such munificence increasing the rotundity of his person.

"And every Sunday your own to go to your duties," said the woman.

"Every Sunday," repeated the driver, emphasizing the adjective.

"Now what do you say to that?" queried the woman, having completed the tally of privileges. "Isn't it worth your while to come to a place like this where you have everything your own way, light work and a good table?"

"Not at that money," said the girl in a tone of quiet

assurance. "If I go to the fair I'll be able to get a far and away bigger money."

"Five ten, then," said the man with a sigh.

"No, thank ye," said Maureen, taking a few steps in the direction of the town.

"Five fifteen, then," the woman shouted after the girl. "Drive on the horse, Bob! Six pound ten!"

"I don't know how you can come to give the girl that," said the man to the woman, when the gig came abreast Maureen. "It's throwing good money away and it's so hard to scrape it together."

"I'm always like that," said the woman, accepting the impeachment and sighing because it was justified. "I always give my servants the best money, and sometimes they're worth it, but more often not."

"Not a lie in what you say, Martha," remarked the man in a tone of whole-hearted approval, and fixing his eyes on Maureen. "Six pound you're offered," he said. "Six pound! A big penny for a girl that has never been here before. Six pound. Now what do you say to it? You're poor on it I'll warrant, and a pound or two won't do you any hurt come Hallowe'en."

Maureen looked at the woman, then at the man.

"It won't do me any hurt," she said stiffly to the latter. "It'll maybe hurt you more to pay it!"

"Ah! that's spirit, Bob," said the woman with a malicious chuckle as if the remark addressed to her friend Bob afforded her cruel enjoyment. "That's spirit. I like a girl iv your cut," addressing Maureen. "Now what's to be done in it? Will we split the difference? Say the word and we'll split it. Six five!"

"Six five," echoed the man.

"All right," said Maureen quietly.

"Then it's no good in you comin' in to the fair," said the woman. "Get up on the car and we'll drive you along to a house back here on the road and you can have a sleep maybe. You're tired, aren't you?"

"Tired's not the word!" said Maureen.

"Well, give me your hand and up you get," said the

woman, catching Maureen by the hand and helping her onto the seat.

The driver reined the horse round, and when they had traveled back about half a mile they turned up a side road where after a ten minutes' brisk drive they came to the door of a little one-storied house. The driver knocked on the door with the butt of his whip, and a sallow-faced woman opened it.

"Good mornin' to ye, Mrs. Thornton," she said in a weak, lifeless voice, gazing at the woman on the car. "What can I do for ye?"

"I've hired this Donegal," said Mrs. Thornton. "She has traveled all the way from her home, and she's tired. Let her stay here till I come back from the fair. Then I'll take her home with me. And don't blab to her either, Mary. Keep a civil tongue in your head."

"I never am one to speak when the business is none iv mine," said the woman in a cowed voice.

"All right," said Mrs. Thornton. "I'll be back as soon as I can. Drive on, Bob."

III

The room was small, cold and evil-smelling, a mere box in which Maureen could not stand upright. Her bed lay on the floor, a shakedown of last year's straw, moldy and malodorous, in fact looking as if it were dung-soaked mulch gathered from a farmyard in the rain and never allowed to dry. On this lay two petticoats, which a ragged scarecrow might have shed in disgust, and a wet bundle wrapped in a check kerchief. One petticoat served the purpose of sheet, the other a blanket, and the bundle wrapped in the check kerchief was the pillow on which Maureen O'Malley would rest her head in sleep. It was now near midnight, the sky clear and starry, such of it as could be seen through the two-paned window near the roof, and the moon rising.

The room was chill and silent, chill because the wind blew up through the cracks in the floor and silent because

everybody was apparently asleep. A sort of deathly gloom seemed to possess the house, as if fell spirits kept their vigils there. Something uncanny pervaded the atmosphere of the place, something that assumed an almost palpable form over Maureen's head when she sat in the kitchen to eat the cold meal that Mrs. Thornton provided and afterwards followed the girl up the ladder leading to her bedroom. Now this Presence, this form without substance or outline, felt but unseen, settled down in the corners to keep watch over Maureen all the night.

The girl sat on her blanket, a prey to thoughts the most gloomy and conflicting. What was the place in which she found herself? She tried to recall her coming, but weariness seemed to blot out all coherence in thought. She recollected certain things with precision, but things as near and as vivid ran hurriedly across the tablet of her mind as if afraid of being memorized.

She recalled the girl, Mary, in the cottage, a poor, half-witted creature, who would not speak of her own accord and answered Maureen's questions with nods and monosyllables.. All day long Maureen remained there, nodding drowsily at times and at intervals falling into short, troubled spasms of slumber.

At seven in the evening the car containing Mrs. Thornton and her friend Bob drew up at the door, called for Maureen, and when she came out she was helped up on the seat beside the man. On the way to her place, over a rocky road, the man put his arm round the girl several times, with the object, as he declared, of keeping her snug in her seat. But on each occasion the girl thrust the hand aside and eased as far from the driver as possible. Finally, after a run of three hours, the car stopped and the two women descended from their seats.

"We've to walk the rest of the way," said Mrs. Thornton. "Across the fields."

The car drove away and the women crossed a wide field, then along a lane, then over further fields, sloughy and miry with the water rising ankle high. Ten minutes brought them to a house that stood high and sullen, with

no light showing through door or window. To Maureen it looked like a prison.

Mrs. Thornton took a key from her pocket, opened the door and entered, Maureen following. The girl's nostrils, rendered susceptible by the long journey in the fresh air, were immediately assailed by a strong, disagreeable odor as if something was putrefying in the house. The moon had not yet risen, and the interior of the dwelling was a block of dense blackness almost palpable.

"Stand there, Donegal, till I get a light," said Mrs. Thornton, leaving Maureen on the threshold and disappearing into the gloom. Maureen could hear the woman scrape a board, probably the table, with her fingers as if groping for something. At the same moment a low whimper, like the wail of a lost puppy, was heard near Maureen, coming from the ground, as far as she could ascertain. It died away but was replaced by a second whimper, closer still, as if the thing were creeping nearer. Maureen edged back to the door shivering with terror. It was a rat! She had heard rats squeal when at home and the sound from the gloom reminded her of them.

A third whimper, nearer this time, reached Maureen's ears. Whatever made the sound was coming closer. The woman was still groping on the table.

"What's makin' that sound at all?" stammered Maureen.

The woman returned no answer, but as if to make up for that the crying was repeated near at hand, then further back, first in one corner then in another. The gloom was filled with these strange, uncanny noises that sounded now like the shrill plaint of trodden mice. They came from all corners, filling the dense obscurity as if it had a thousand tongues.

"Where did that strap leave the matches?" the woman suddenly cried in a querulous voice. "Nothin' is right when I leave the house for a minute."

Maureen's eyes could now make out the form of the woman in the darkness, black and shadowy as if the gloom had accumulated into a darker heap in one part of the

room. She was now near the window, which was slowly taking on a lighter shade and losing the gloom which was its a moment before. The moon was rising.

There was a sudden creak under Mrs. Thornton's feet and she bent to the ground.

"Hung it up on the floor as I thought," she said. "The trollop!"

Straightening herself she struck a match and lit an oil lamp which was nailed to the mantelpiece over the fireless hearth. Maureen looked round her and saw the room.

It was a square compartment, the walls unpapered and black as if covered with soot, the floor earthen and pitted with holes, the roof finger-deep in dust from which hung venerable cobwebs. On the ashes of the dead fire sat a skillet, lid off and empty. A chair stood under the window, and on this was piled a heap of children's clothing. Maureen noticed these things cursorily, for in them there was nothing extraordinary. She had seen houses cleaner and again houses dirtier. She was a servant girl anyway, and if her mistress lived here surely she could.

But what excited her attention and wonder was the small oblong box placed in the angle of the wall facing her. In this something was moving restlessly and crying. The cry was the same as reached her ears when she stood at the door in the darkness, the same low, weak whimper that reminded her of a trampled mouse. As a blanket covered the box nothing living was visible. Possibly the thing, whatever it was, had crawled on the floor in the gloom, and now when the lamp was lit scurried into the box again. It was certainly nearer her feet a moment ago.

As she thought of this she looked in the corner near the door, to see a second box, covered over with a print cloth. But there was nothing alive in that box, or at least if there was it neither moved nor cried. Something wailed on her left, a cry similar to that which she had already heard. Maureen turned round. At her back near the wall was a third box the same as the others, and out of this, from a huddle of rags, a white face was peering, the puny face of a child.

"Well, Donegal, ered, placed [illegible]an, sitting down on a chair by the fir[illegible] face in[illegible] at Maureen. "Do you like the place?"

"I like it," said Maureen, but there was uncertainty in her tones.

"I was just thinkin' that you did by the way you keep lookin' at everything in the house. You don't see anything wrong with it, Donegal, do you now?"

"No," said Maureen.

"No, ma'am, when you speak to me, Donegal," said the woman sharply. "I'm your mistress now. Amn't I?"

"You are, ma'am!"

"I know the Donegals," said the woman with a wry curl of her upper lip. "They're all double-faced, but when they've to deal with me they find that it doesn't pay to get up till any tricks. Can you wash?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Maureen.

"Well, a short job till it's time till go till bed," said Mrs. Thornton, eyeing Maureen with a critical eye. "There's two blankets on the back of that chair. There's a bucket of water down there at the back of you. Steep the blankets in it, wring them and put them over the back of the chair again. Then I'll show you where you're to sleep the night."

Maureen rinsed the blankets, wrung them and placed them on the chair as directed. All the time she worked the children kept crying from their various boxes. There were four children in the room, three in boxes, one in a cradle under the window. These four cried in turn at times, one beginning when the other left off, again in concord, all the little voices vying with one another as if in contest. Maureen could see only one face. This face, old as time, gazed at her with large, curious eyes as if it wanted to question the girl about something. There was something pitiable in the creature, in the contour of the face, which sank inwards, the drooping mouth and the expression of the eyes. In fact the child seemed to desire something, and that something, in Maureen's estimate, was food.

That four children of the window, should be in one house, where the only other occupant from Maureen, was Mrs. Thornton, did not strike the Donegal girl as being in any way peculiar. But this outlook of the girl had education and circumstance to vindicate it. She had never been away from home before, had never traveled on a railway train, had a mind as yet undeveloped and without sense of the value or fitness of things outside the parish in which she was born. So many impressions novel and strange had been hers for the last forty-eight hours that now, her perceptions blunted with sorrow and mind befogged with weariness, she was unable to analyze her own sensations.

"It's time for you to get till bed," said Mrs. Thornton when Maureen had completed her work. "Some people can go to bed when they want to, but not me. I have to see after these children, light the fire to dry their clothes and blankets. It's a hard life, Donegal!"

"And can I not help ye to do a bit iv yer work?" asked Maureen. "I'm not sleepy, ma'am."

"You're to go till bed now," said the woman coldly. "You're to do what you're told when you're here, Donegal. Come after me and I'll show you your room."

Maureen lived this scene over again as she sat on her bed in the attic. She was weary but could not get to sleep. In fact she did not want to sleep. It was so cold in the room with the wind blowing up through the floor, sliding in slyly under the door, chilling her legs, her arms and her back. Dark things lurked in the corner of the room, glowering out at the hapless girl. Her fancy conjured horrible visions in the apartment. Alternate shades, lighter where the moon rays streamed through the window, darker where the gloom massed itself in the angles of the walls, formed themselves into varied shapes, spectral and forbidding. The wind sighing against the window was something, form without substance, a fell spirit trying to enter; the low, puling cries of the children downstairs, which could be heard now and again, sounded like the groans of souls condemned to eternal torment.

Maureen shuddered, placed her elbow on her little check bundle and her face in the cup of her hand. Unconsciously her eyes closed, her head slipped down the forearm and came to rest in the crook of her elbow. Thus Mrs. Thornton found her when she came to wake the Donegal at six o'clock the next morning.

IV

"Well, Donegal," said Mrs. Thornton, when she and Maureen came down to the apartment termed a kitchen, which looked for all the world like a lumber-room into which a number of boxes (and one cradle) had been flung and in which little children had been accidentally placed. "Well, Donegal, do you always sleep with your clothes on?"

"I was tired, ma'am," Maureen replied. "And I sat down for a minit and didn't know anything more till ye wakened me."

"Well, in one way there's somethin' to be said for it, goin' to sleep like that," remarked Mrs. Thornton. "You can get up more quick in the mornin' if you haven't to get in till your clothes when I call you. It's good from that point of view, but then, on the other hand, it's a sign of lazy bones, and lazy bones is no good when a girl has to put hand till a hard job."

"But I had next to no sleep the night afore last," said Maureen.

"Ma'am," said Mrs. Thornton, drawing attention to something which Maureen's speech had lacked.

"Ma'am," Maureen repeated.

"Well, it's a Donegal cub to find excuse for anything," said Mrs. Thornton dryly. "If it's fallin' to sleep at work it's because they couldn't sleep the night before, and if they go out till the well for a pail of water and be late comin' back it's always that they've sprained an ankle or broke a leg or somethin'. Lies! God! they could beat a devil with their lies. That is most of them, but not all," said Mrs. Thornton with a certain graciousness. "There

was one, the girl that was here before you, and she was, was—'' The mistress was on the point of saying ''good,'' but the word being too definite and final she modified the unspoken utterance—''She wasn't a bad girl in her way. Not too forward, Donegal, not too forward. Her name was Mary Sharkey.''

''Yes, ma'am,'' said Maureen, seeing that Mrs. Thornton waited for a reply.

''She always got up when I called her, never poked her nose into what didn't consarn her, did what she was bid and done it quickly,'' said Mrs. Thornton. ''And what she would ate wasn't a great lot; I mean not a very great lot, not like some Donegals that never can get their guts filled. Now are ye hard to fill, Donegal?''

''Not very, ma'am,'' said Maureen timidly.

''It's breakfast time now, and what would you like?'' asked Mrs. Thornton, holding one hand against the other and turning her eyes ceilingwards as if preparing for the worst.

''Whatever's goin', ma'am,'' said Maureen.

''That means nothin','' said Mrs. Thornton. ''I'll make the breakfast ready and you put your hand to it.''

Maureen looked round the room, which showed stark and cold in the morning, with no relieving tint on wall or floor. The ash-dead fireplace represented something forgotten and lost. In front of it stood the chair on which Maureen had hung the blankets on the previous night. These blankets were gone now. One of them, as far as could be seen, now covered the box in the angle of the room near the doorway, and the other was on the cradle under the window. The fireplace showed no change from the previous night, as if turf had not been lit on it since then. If that was so the children were covered with wet blankets.

One child was sitting up in a box sucking its thumb—a sign of hunger. Two others were whimpering beneath their coverings, the one in the cradle was hidden and silent. Mrs. Thornton watched Maureen as the girl with her eyes took stock of the room.

''Mary Sharkey,'' said the woman at last, ''always saw

what was to do the minit she got up. With her one hand wasn't as long as the other when there was something to do. That was Mary Sharkey, not a bad girl in her way."

"What'll I do, ma'am?" asked Maureen.

"What'll you do?" said Mrs. Thornton with a groan of despair. "You ask what you'll do with everything to do!"

"Will I wash the children?" asked Maureen.

"You're to do what I tell you," said Mrs. Thornton icily. "First you're to sweep the floor, then you're to go out and milch the cows in the byre. Then make the byre and after that wash the spuds in the brook. Then I'll tell you what else to do, Donegal."

Maureen swept the floor, milked the cows (there were two of them) and made the byre. When this was done she went to Mrs. Thornton, who was boiling a kettle over a smoky fire.

"Well, that wasn't so long," said the woman, referring to the work which Maureen had completed. "Mary Sharkey could do it quicker, much quicker, but maybe when you get used till it—"

"Where are the spuds, ma'am?" asked Maureen.

"The spuds!" asked Mrs. Thornton in an awestruck voice. "The spuds! What spuds?"

"The ones that I'm to wash, ma'am."

"The ones that you're to wash!" repeated Mrs. Thornton, the tone of awe giving place to one of agony. "You mean to say that they're not washed yet?"

"No, ma'am."

"Oh, Donegal!" said the woman, awe and agony giving place to resignation in her voice. "Oh, Donegal! Donegal!"

After a long silence she deigned to tell Maureen where the spuds could be found, and after these were washed she gave the girl several duties to perform, the washing of hippins, the scrubbing of tables and chairs, straining of milk, and the many other jobs which a house, apparently unattended for many days, needed.

"Now we'll have our breakfast," said Mrs. Thornton.

"Donegals are quicker to table than anywhere else in the world."

It was now nine o'clock. Maureen was very hungry, but feeling pity for the children in their various receptacles and deeming it policy to suggest that they should be fed first, she turned to Mrs. Thornton.

"I can wait till the children have their breakfasts, ma'am," she said. "The wee dears will be hungry."

"Well, that!" the woman exclaimed, raising her hands shoulder high and dropping them helplessly on the table at which she sat. "Well, that! And a Donegal, too. Mary Sharkey, and her with me for close on two years, had never the face to say what was the right thing for her to do. Sit down! Have your breakfast and hold your tongue!"

Maureen sat down and ate her breakfast in silence. The repast was a very poor one, cold stirabout and sour buttermilk. Maureen's rusty spoon had a reasty taste that set the teeth on edge. Her bowl seemed never to have known the offices of a dishclout; its exterior was streaked yellow as if some dye had fallen there, and the upper rim was spotted with specks of dried clay, which seemed to have been grafted into the delf.

Mrs. Thornton ate very quickly, swallowing her stirabout with guttle and guzzle, making a noise that reminded Maureen of swine in a trough. When she had finished she hit the table with her spoon as if to signify that time was up.

"Well, Donegal, I have a good appetite," she exclaimed, "but—"

Maureen winced at the insinuation, but continued her meal.

"Mary Sharkey always finished just when I finished," said Mrs. Thornton. "And she was a splendid girl with her hands when she had a day's work fornenst her."

Maureen finished her meal, but felt almost as hungry now as when she started. She would have liked to ask for more, but several things prevented her from doing this. The vessel that contained the food filled her with physical

repulsion; the steely eyes of her mistress cowed her; and the vaunted excellencies of Mary Sharkey threw her own incompetence and lack of servantly qualities into the glaring conspicuity of mud blobs on a lime-washed wall.

"Now, Donegal," said the ogre, "get the cows out and I'll show you where you're to drive them to. And when you're there I'll tell you what your job is."

The cows were taken out and driven into a field crossed by the two women on the previous night. This field was strongly fenced. A stick thrown across the gap at one end would be sufficient to keep the cattle in the pasture all day. Despite this, however, Maureen was assigned her position in the field on top of a mound in the center.

"You're to stay here all the day," said the woman, "right on top iv the height, and keep your eyes on the cows and not let them stray all over the country. And also keep your eye on the road," she continued, pointing her finger into the distance at the highway that roamed across the fields. "Keep your eye on it, and if you see any one comin' down to me, in the house with you as hard as you can skin and let me know. By any one I mean them that comes with a collar and tie and maybe on a car. People with a collar and tie can't be trusted; they're mean and mingy, and maybe it's puttin' their hands on things that they have no right to. Now what was it that I've told you?"

Maureen repeated the instructions given by the woman.

"That's just what I said, Donegal," said Mrs. Thornton almost grudgingly as if she were incensed at Maureen's ability in remembering details. "That's what I've said, and if you've an eye like Mary Sharkey you'll run to me in that great hurry that if you fall you'll not take time to rise. And another thing, Donegal," she added, "see that house away there at the butt of the brae?"

She pointed her finger at a slated house in the far distance.

"You see it?" she asked.

"I see it, ma'am," said Maureen.

"Well, take heed of what I say," said the woman. "Some

day you may see a white sheet put out on the holly bush that's on this near side iv that house. The minit you see a white sheet put out there, Donegal, skin down to me as if the divil from hell was after you and let me know. Now what have you to do, Donegal, if ever you see a white sheet on the holly bush?''

''Run and tell you, ma'am,'' Maureen replied.

''Now you know everything,'' said Mrs. Thornton. ''You're here to do what I tell you, to watch the cows, the road and the holly bush. And if you don't do it, I'll peel the skin off iv the back iv you.''

Then leaving the girl to herself and her cows she went back to the house.

At one o'clock she returned with some cold potatoes and an aged herring which to judge by its taste must have lain in the pickling-bin since last Candlemas. These she gave to Maureen with the curt announcement that it was dinner-time.

''And don't fall to sleep while ye're atin','' said Mrs. Thornton. ''All the Donegal cubs, bar Mary Sharkey maybe, had a habit of falling till sleep without rhyme or reason.''

There was no tea given the girl, and at seven o'clock, weary to death and hungry, she drove the cows in, tied them to their stakes and milked them. After that a number of little jobs were done, washing of potatoes, tidying the nursery, carrying in peat from the stack outside the door and piling them in a snug heap against the wall of the kitchen.

''Now you'll be wantin' somethin' in your guts, I warrant,'' said Mrs. Thornton when Maureen had finished. ''You've the will of the table that I sit at myself, so down and make a meal iv it.''

Maureen sat down to her spoon and bowl, the same as she had in the morning. It was stirabout again and buttermilk. Maureen ate quickly, but not as quickly as Mrs. Thornton. When the mistress finished guzzling she looked at the girl.

"You can put it down," she said with a sarcastic leer curling her dry lips. "Ye can put it down, Donegal. . . . But finish the bowl and off to bed with you."

V

Weeks crawled by, and with the passage of time Maureen gained some idea of her mistress, though she was slow in forming a definite conception of the woman. She only saw Mrs. Thornton in the morning and evening, when tidying the nursery, making the byre, milking the cows, and eating her meals. All the time that was not spent in the field herding the cows, she was under the supervision of the woman. Even out in the pasture land she would at times become conscious of being observed, and looking back from her post to the house she would now and again see the mistress watching her through a window or door.

Mrs. Thornton never allowed the girl to come near the children.

"Donegals know nothin' about wains," she used to say when Maureen approached one of the cots in the kitchen. "If you're not told to go near them, don't go near them."

The woman's order was a threat, and Maureen kept away from the children, though her heart was filled with pity for the little mites. They seemed to belong to nobody, and they never laughed. They opened their eyes in the morning, looked out from their dirty cots with that serious, wondering look of little children to which is added a peculiar restless air that is not the property of the well-treated young. What their ages might be Maureen could not estimate. It was a harrowing sight to see them start crying when their morning inspection of the kitchen came to an end. All through the day they howled alternately or in unison, querulous atoms that seemed to cry against the injustice of a plight to which they were condemned.

Mrs. Thornton was a tall, angular woman, cut from a heavy pattern and utterly devoid of all the mental graces

which tone down austerity of features and inconcinnity of bodily form. Laughter, kindliness and love were utterly foreign to her. She was a hard woman, cruel and greedy, the springs of pity, if they ever existed, dry in her soul. Her age might have been thirty, probably a little more.

Though Mrs. Thornton kept Maureen in ignorance regarding the children, there was the loose tongue of the assemblage which undid in a moment the barrier which took months to build. The tongue in this case belonged to Susan Lacy, a servant on a neighboring farm. This servant accompanied Maureen as the girl was on her way back from the Catholic chapel of Newtonsmith one Sunday morning towards the latter end of August.

"Ye're out early on it the mornin'," said Susan at the chapel gate, by way of greeting.

"I go to Mass this early every Sunday mornin'," Maureen replied. "It's only to mornin' Mass that I'm let."

"So it's with Her that ye're?" asked the girl whom Maureen had never before met.

"Mrs. Thornton! It is, sure."

"And how many wains has she on her now?"

"Four," Maureen replied.

"And when are they goin' to die?" asked Susan casually.

"Die!" Maureen echoed. "I don't know what ye mean!"

"Iv course an' ye don't at all," said the other girl with a knowing nod. "Catch Her gettin' ones to work in her place that's not green on it. She murders all the wains that she gets."

"How?" asked Maureen with a shudder. "What does she do to them?"

"I'm sure that I don't know," said the girl. "It's wains out iv the workhouse that she gets, them kind iv wains ye know that nobody wants."

"Aye," Maureen nodded, recalling her own life in Dungarrow.

"They're called by a quality word, them wains, 'ligitimate," said the girl. "But it doesn't matter what name they get, they're always the same. And when they go to Her they're as good as done for."

"But can't the polis take them away from her if she's like that?" Maureen inquired.

"They can't nab the weasel and it sleeping," was the reply. "The polis can't get up soon enough for her over there. No one sees Her to do anything, and the wains die with decline or somethin', and the girls that had them pay Mrs. Thornton."

"But if she's like that can't nobody tell on her?" asked Maureen.

"If they tell what can they prove?" said Susan. "Nothin' at all, and nothin's no good with no evidence."

Maureen went home from Mass that day her head filled with thoughts perplexing and strange. She walked along the road, her boots well worn at toe and heel, scraping the gravel, her head sunk on her breast. These children had something in common with herself, she thought, "One of them kind iv wains that nobody wants."

"Like meself," she said, almost grimly. Then she thought of the mother that watched over her in the home in Dungarrow. "I wasn't left all on my own when I was wee," she said, and as she thought of this a wave of pity towards the poor, ill-treated children in the house of Mrs. Thornton filled her soul.

"But maybe it's only talk," she said, recalling the story told her a short time ago. "People do be sayin' things. But I'll find out for meself the night," she added.

That night she found out for herself. Unable to sleep in her attic, she sat on her bed, turning over in her mind what she had heard that morning. At one o'clock, drawing her shawl round her shoulders, she stole down the stairs in stocking soles and entered the kitchen.

Here all was dark. Out of the gloom came the sound of a child crying, and rising louder was the heavy snore of Mrs. Thornton, asleep on the bed in the corner of the room. On the left as she entered was one of the boxes under the window. Holding her breath, Maureen stole up quietly and touched the blanket which covered the baby. The wrap, as she had suspected, was wet as if it had been

recently soaked in water. It was one of the blankets which the girl had washed before coming to bed.

Two hours later the Inspector of the N. S. P. C. C., resident at Newtonsmith, was roused from his sleep by a local policeman who was accompanied by a girl that desired to make a certain statement to the Inspector. The matter of which she wanted to speak related to children who were treated harshly in the neighborhood. The girl made a statement but would not give the Inspector her name, not even when he assured her that the Society would never disclose her identity.

That morning Maureen O'Malley was afoot and at work when Mrs. Thornton awoke.

VI

At ten o'clock of that day, when Maureen was sitting on her hillock in the center of the pasture field, her eyes fixed on the slated house in the distance, the property of Bob Baxter, she saw a white sheet wave out and cover the holly bush that stood by the near gable end. The girl got to her feet, stood for a moment, as if undecided as to what she should do, then ran to her mistress to inform her of this occurrence.

"They are comin'!" shrieked Mrs. Thornton, rising from the table at which she sat, when she saw the girl cross the threshold.

"The sheet on the holly bush," Maureen gasped, suddenly feeling that she had done wrong in coming in. The white sheet was probably a signal of danger hung out by Mr. Baxter. No doubt the police were now on their way towards the house.

"Well, get to work, get your hands to it, to the job at once!" shouted Mrs. Thornton, rushing to the cradle and with one sweep lifting the blanket which covered the child therein and throwing the blanket at Maureen. "And this! And this! And this!" she roared, uncovering the boxes and throwing the wraps on the floor. "Take them all with you as fast as you can and put them in the byre. In a

place that's dry, and don't trail them in the dung. Run like hell, run! And come back!"

The greed-bitten woman slavered and spluttered as she gave directions, but never ceased in her work for a moment. Maureen lifted the blankets and found that they were all wringing wet, just as if they had come from a washing-tub. Taking them out she placed them in the byre and on coming back found that Mrs. Thornton had taken some children's clothes and dry blankets from some hidden recess of the house. These lay on a chair under the window.

The woman was now tending a child with affectionate solicitude, rubbing its belly with a dry towel, washing its face and head and wrapping it in warm swathing-bands. On the floor lay a heap of old and evil-smelling garments, the every-day appointments of the baby.

"Out with these, Donegal," shouted the mistress, pointing her finger at the huddle of dirty clothes. "Put them intil the tub outside the door and mind that they're to be washed if there's ones puttin' any questions till you."

"Yes, ma'am," said Maureen, and did as she was directed.

Twenty minutes later a man, tall, with a slight stoop, dressed in knickers and a Norfolk jacket, came to the door and entered. By this time the children were all nicely arranged in their cots, two regaling themselves from milk-bottles, one sucking a dummy teat, and a fourth whimpering. As the stranger came in, the woman fixed a surprised look on him as if she had not expected a visitor. He looked round the room, taking stock of all the inmates.

"I didn't expect you the day," said Mrs. Thornton, with a certain jaunty air purporting that though she did not expect the visitor she was in no way put out by his coming.

"True, true, Mrs. Thornton," said the man politely but firmly, as if excusing himself for the unheralded visit but giving the impression that he was only doing his duty coming in this manner. "Now," he asked, in a polite tone, "how are they all under your care?"

"Just as you see," said the woman with a wave of her hand. This wave embraced all the room, the cobwebs on the roof, the children and even Maureen. On this last perquisite of the establishment the man fixed a look of vague recognition as if he had met her on some previous occasion.

"Donegal?" he inquired casually, and Mrs. Thornton nodded.

"A smarter lookin' girl than the one that was here," said the man, speaking as if the object under consideration were not within ear-shot.

"Aye," said Mrs. Thornton, drawling out her monosyllable as if it were subject to great modification.

"Well, how about these?" said the man, crossing the room to the child that was whimpering a moment previously. Now it was sitting up sucking its finger. "This one looks ill. Is it?"

The woman shook her head.

"It's too thin on it. Do you give it enough food?"

"It doesn't take kindly to its meals," said the woman. "It's wastin'."

"Have you seen the doctor about it?" inquired the man.

"He was here three months back," said Mrs. Thornton with an upward turn of her chin like an animal at bay. "And I had to pay him for it, too."

"But there's the dispensary doctor that you can call in free," said the visitor. "Why haven't you got him to see the children?"

"I haven't time to leave them to go and look for the doctor," said the woman. "If I did the dear knows what would take place."

"Well, send the girl to the doctor if you can't go yourself," said the man, pointing at Maureen. "And this child?" he inquired, looking at the one that was sucking its thumb. "You got it from the workhouse six months ago?"

"Yes," said the woman. "Indeed and it was a poor ranny of a wain when it came here. The mother, her

that had it, said it was makin' no sign of doin' good."

"Mary Lyon?" asked the visitor.

Mrs. Thornton nodded.

"Where is the girl now?"

"Hired in Dawlish," said Mrs. Thornton. "But the keepin' iv that wain is a hard job. And I get paid for my trouble only thirty-two and six a month."

"And for these others?" asked the man in the Norfolk jacket, taking a book and pencil from his pocket and making an entry. "You get paid for them, too?"

"For two of them," said the woman. "The other's my own wain."

"What's the age of the child Lyon?" asked the man.

"Past two."

"Can it walk?"

"Not yet. It's doncy on it."

"Can it stand?"

"It can't," said the woman. "And if it can't, I can't make it."

"I suppose you can't," said the visitor, again looking at Maureen.

"Do you like your place?" he asked her.

"Middling," said Maureen; "if it wasn't that I was half starved."

"What!" yelled Mrs. Thornton. "Half starved and you sit at the same table as myself!"

"I thought I did, till I came in the day to find you sittin' down to this," said Maureen, pointing to the table at which Mrs. Thornton was sitting when she entered half an hour previously. Here a good breakfast was spread out, a large bowl of tea, several thick slices of bread and butter and a plate which contained two eggs and a rasher of bacon.

"There, listen to her," said Mrs. Thornton, appealing to the visitor. "A full breakfast in the morn, and dinner and supper that would do the heart good to see and, and, and—" she faltered and stopped as if her rage had overmastered her.

"Out!" she shrieked when composure was regained.

"Out, Donegal, and set about washin' the clothes for the wains! And mind you don't let me see your nose inside the door till I send for you."

Thus admonished, Maureen with a shrug of indifference made her way outside and began her washing. Half an hour later she was still there, when the visitor in the Norfolk jacket left and made his way across the fields to the highroad.

"Now," said Maureen to herself when silence fell on the house, "now it'll be for me that she'll be goin' when she comes out. Well, there, let her if she does. I don't care!"

As she spoke these words she gave a stubborn shake of her head and rinsed the clothes so viciously that an onlooker would have thought the girl bore the habiliments of the children some enmity.

An hour passed and still Mrs. Thornton did not come outside the door. It was then that the girl heard the sound of footsteps, and presently a man, stout and panting, as if he had been running, came round the corner of the house. It was Mrs. Thornton's friend, Bob Baxter, the man who drove the car home from the hiring-fair of Strabane. Maureen knew him well, having often seen him since when he visited the house of her mistress.

"Maureen, dear, are you busy at your work?" he asked in soft, sugary tones.

"Yes, sir," Maureen replied, having been ordered by Mrs. Thornton to address Baxter as "sir" whenever she spoke to him.

"And your mistress?" the man asked.

"She's inside," said Maureen.

The man went indoors and for half an hour Maureen could hear the sound of low voices from the house. At the end of that time Mrs. Thornton stuck her head through the door.

"Come in, Donegal," she called. "I want to speak to you."

Maureen went in. Mr. Baxter was sitting on a chair

near the window, one leg across the other and a pipe in his mouth. Mrs. Thornton stood near the table, arms folded and her eyes fixed on Maureen.

"Donegal," said she in a low, angry voice, which caused Maureen to start, not because it was angry, for Mrs. Thornton seemed always in a temper, but because it was low. The mistress generally shrieked her reprimands. "Donegal," she said, "what's that that you said about your meals here in my house?"

"The truth," said Maureen defiantly.

"But you sit at the same table as myself," said the woman. "And that was what I said when we made the bargain at Strabane the day of the fair. I said you'd have your meals at the same table as myself. Didn't I now, Bob?" she appealed to her friend.

"That was the bargain," said the man, looking at Maureen.

"And you have breakfast with me at the table every morning," Mrs. Thornton reminded Maureen. "Every mornin' since you came here. And you're free to go to duties every Sunday."

"I've to get up an hour earlier every Sunday morn to do the work afore I leave the house," said Maureen, a flood of color settling on her face. "And then I've to work an hour later in the night when I come back."

"But it wasn't in the bargain that you hadn't to do these things," the mistress persisted. "You'll bear me out in what I say, Bob."

"I'll bear you out in that, Mrs. Thornton," said Bob.

"It doesn't matter what either iv the two iv ye say," said Maureen in an angry voice which was as much a surprise to herself as to the listeners. "It's not the life iv a dog here. Even cows in the field get a change in what they ate, but here it's always the same. To think that anybody would be made to eat next to nothin' and then get what they eat in a bowl that's too dirty to be set afore a pig!"

Mrs. Thornton positively reeled; she turned pale, then

red. She fixed a malign glance on Maureen, then suddenly, as if seeing a way of getting the better of the girl, her lips formed in a diabolical smile.

"I'm afeeard that she's no good for here," she said, speaking to Bob. "We'd do worse than chase her away."

"Not till ye pay me up to the day, anyway," said Maureen doggedly. Now, having overstepped a certain limit and spoken angrily to Mrs. Thornton, she felt as in a delirium that there was nothing more in the house sacred to her. In her heart was a sudden itching to defy all restrictions and enjoy liberty of speech, unbridled and unbounded.

"Aye, ye take a girl here as yer servant and treat her as a slave," she said, speaking very quietly, and letting word by word drop slowly from her lips, as if they were things of value to be doled out sparingly. "You take a girl here and it's up early and down late with never a minute to herself and next to nothing to eat. And such a house as one has to go into with a bed that's no better than a beggar's shakedown and a roof lettin' in the rain on yer face whenever it's a shower. That's the kind iv a house that a girl gets here."

Suddenly she broke down and burst into a fit of sobbing. The tears streamed from her eyes and ran down her cheeks. Mrs. Thornton looked at the girl with self-satisfied smirk. It was right and proper that Maureen, the Donegal, should be made to weep.

"She's too proud on it," she said to Mr. Baxter. "That's what's wrong with the girl. Far above her station!"

"You're too hard on her, I think," said Bob in a voice peculiarly kind. "Let her go out to her cows now and she'll be all right come dinner-time."

"Donegal," said Mrs. Thornton, "go out to the cows, and I'll have more to say to you when I've time to spare the night."

But that night Mrs. Thornton, having troubles of her own, had no time at her disposal to heap opprobrium on the head of the Donegal. During the afternoon a doctor

called in to see the children, and the child Lyon, the illegitimate offspring of the servant girl, Mary Lyon, was taken back to the mansion which saw its birth, the parish workhouse.

VII

When the magistrates at Newtonsmith Petty Sessions came to the decision that the woman Thornton was guilty of wilful neglect in the case of the child Lyon, which died in the workhouse, they sentenced her to nine months' imprisonment. In this way was justice administered, and the bald pates and lichen-gray beards nodded together on the bench, satisfied that they had done the right thing in the eyes of God and man in sentencing the woman for her gross violation of all laws human and divine. In the furthering of civilization towards an ultimate goal of well-being and brotherly love, Maureen O'Malley had also done her duty. As witness for the prosecution she had told of the little children starving in the house of her mistress, told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth as she had sworn to do. The Gods of justice were appeased, the criminal was sentenced and the well-fed magistrates ambled home to their dinners. They left the court-house just as Maureen O'Malley, homeless and forgotten, went out alone into the bare street of Newtonsmith.

What to do now she had not the least idea. The house in which she had stayed for the last four months was deserted, the children were gone, the mistress gone. It was no good going back there. And Maureen had not a penny.

But still it was harvest-time. The weather was fine, the workers were busy in the hay and cornfields. The crops were being gathered in and stored for the coming winter. Surely it would be easy to get a job.

"So you're free, Maureen!"

The man who spoke was Bob Baxter. He had just come out from one of the shops that lined the street, a bundle in his arms. This he flung with a mighty heave into the well of his side-car that stood by the curb.

"Free from what, Mr. Baxter?" asked Maureen coldly. She did not like the man.

"From the polis and the court," said Baxter with a low laugh. "To think iv it! Maureen givin' away Mrs. Thornton."

"She's not Mrs.," said Maureen. "She's 'Miss.' "

"Ah! and they've found out all about her," said the man with a start. "What else did they find out?" he asked. "I hadn't time to go myself. I've such a lot to do with the harvest."

"I don't know what they said," said Maureen wearily. "It's past thinkin' iv the kind iv a woman that she was." The girl spoke as if Mrs. Thornton had left the world for good.

"But I thought that she was a married woman," said Baxter, leaning against the side of the car and looking at Maureen.

" 'Twas dacenter to let on that she was, I suppose," said Maureen. "But anyway I don't want to talk any more about her."

"Aye, aye," said the man thoughtfully. "She'll be in the black hole for nine months. And what are you goin' to do now, Maureen?" he asked suddenly as if the plight of the Donegal just occurred to him.

"I don't know," said Maureen. "But as long as one trusts in God things will turn out for the best in the long run."

"Yes, I suppose, Maureen, that that's one way to look at it," he replied. "But it never helps to sow the corn."

"That an' all," said Maureen proudly, "I'd rather tramp the roads than be in a house like the house that I was in."

"Aye, 'twas a hard house," the man agreed. "But maybe she'd her own troubles, for one never knows. Anyway, we'll not speak any more about her. About yourself, Maureen," he added. "Now where are you for?"

"I don't know," faltered the girl.

"But it's not the thing to go out on the road and not

knowin' where it will lead to," said Bob Baxter. "Everybody has servants and to spare, and no one will give you a job. The harvest is almost in, anyway."

"It's used to things worse even than trampin' the road that I am," said Maureen, wrapping her shawl round her shoulders as if on the point of going off. "One gets tired iv a house that they don't like, and it's not half as hard to bear the roads."

"But the ones that bees on the road," said Baxter, shaking his head. "You never know what you're runnin' up against, beggars and tinkers maybe."

"Maybe there are ones that bees called dacent and them worse and far worse than beggars and tinkers," said Maureen. "Anyway it's off that I am."

"But if ye'd get a place would you take it?" asked Baxter. "A good place, and not in any way like the one that you were in last? Would you take it?"

"I would sure," was the girl's reply. "But where's the place?"

"It's a girl to help in the house, that's wanted," said Baxter. "The work's light and the table's at her will, not like a table that I've heard iv not so long ago."

As he said these last words a thick smile crawled across his face and he fixed a knowing look on Maureen and winked.

"Where's this place, then?" asked the girl.

"On my farm," said the man. "It'll be aisy for you there, for I'm never hard on them that I get to work."

"And what's the wages?" asked Maureen, putting the question idly in order to have a moment to consider the offer.

"Well, the year's well on now," said Mr. Baxter slowly. "This is the third day of September, and it leaves just a month and a half till the hirin' iv Strabane. What d'ye say to thirty bob?"

"I'd rather chance my luck on the road," said Maureen, shaking her head in proud defiance, as if throwing a challenge in the face of the future.

"Thirty-two and six," said the man. "Ye'll have the cookin' to do and that means that ye'll have charge of the place, bag and baggage."

"And can I get to my duties?"

"Every Sunday," said Mr. Baxter. "Every Sunday, and ye'll not have to get up earlier on that account. I always act fair and above board to them that's hired in my house. Thirty-two and six money down on the twelfth of November and the hiring-fair on then."

He drawled out the last words lovingly as if the winter hiring-fair was a privilege for which the man himself was responsible.

Maureen was silent, weighing over in her mind the offer which Baxter had just made her. A fever of restlessness and fear as she contemplated the future seized the girl; her whole body quivered. The road leading from the town out into the country beyond stretched away from her feet, cold and forbidding. If she could not get a job starvation lay in front of her. Dangers would certainly beset her on the highway where without surety for the future all ends were uncertain. Baxter might really be a good man. She recollected how he had spoken on her behalf a few weeks previously in the house of Mrs. Thornton. Should she accept the man's offer? Anyway, beggars are not choosers. She thought of the cold hedgerows by night, the pitiless sky, the falling rain.

"And my house is far and away nearer Newtonsmith church than the one you were in," said the man as if continuing a subject, although he had not spoken for five minutes. "And it'll be easy to go there and easy to get back."

"All right; I'll come with ye," said Maureen, bowing her head as if to a destiny which she felt approaching.

VIII

It was dry and cold out of doors, with a brisk wind shaking the aging leaves from the trees and blowing them across the farmyard. Here the trampled droppings of

cows, chaff from winnowing fans and wisps of hay and straw coalescing formed a thick mulch which covered the cobblestones.

Maureen O'Malley, after a hard day's work, milking and feeding cows, cleaning out the byre and stable and doing the hundred and one other jobs which come to the farm-hand every day, felt very weary as she went to her room and sat down on the corner of her bed for a moment, wishing, with the vague dream of the weary when it is bed hour, that by some mysterious process she could get into bed without the trouble of getting there. But this not being possible, she sat down on the corner of the bed and gave way to dreams. Even there was a certain joy in prolonging anticipation of rest, knowing that she had eight hours' sleep in front of her.

Bob Baxter went out in the morning on his car, bound for the town of Newtonsmith, telling Maureen that if he were late in returning that night she was on no account to sit up and wait for him. Master and servant were the only occupants of this steading, and some six weeks had now passed since sentence was passed on Mrs. Thornton.

Now all alone in the house, Maureen decided to turn into bed. Night passes quickly for the limb-wearied who fall asleep night after night from the same job and awake to the same job morning after morning. Farm labor is monotonous, especially for those who have no interest in the farm beyond the wages paid them at the heel of the year. When the corn browns, the servant says: "To-morrow or the day after I cut it, and that is not an easy job!" or says, when the bogland dries and the straight turf curls on the spread field: "I'll have to stack them soon, and that is sore on the fingers."

But the farmer's outlook is somewhat different. The spread of land, hedged, ditched, fenced and watered, embraces in it a past and a future. It belonged to his father and will, when the time comes, belong to his sons. Every bank and brae breathes a tradition of days gone and a hope of days coming. To the servant it is different, mean-

ing tenure on sufferance for a season, sweat, weariness and longings. It is a place, but not a home.

This Maureen felt and felt acutely, when a moment was given her to rest, to straighten her back and to think. All day long under the crawling sun she worked, longing for the night and sleep; at night she feared the speedy return of the morning. She had no friend, no one to write her a letter asking how she was getting on, no one to write to. Her mind was gradually becoming torpid, her face set with that hard cast which comes to features that have forgotten how to smile.

In the beginning when she came to the place she would sing a song at the milking in the morning and at night she would sit for a while in her room before going to bed and by candle light write long letters on scraps of paper. But these letters she tore up when finished, not knowing any one to send them to. That was six weeks ago. Now the girl neither sang nor wrote. When her day's work came to an end, a torpor seemed to seize her limbs and her brain, and she went to bed. Once or twice, or was it three times, she awoke in the morning and found herself lying on the bed still clothed as she had left her work on the night before. Maureen had then sat down on the bed and without undressing had fallen asleep.

"Well, I can't sleep like that the night," she said, her elbow on the pillow, her brown head resting on her hand and her eyes heavy with sleep. Rising to her feet, she stretched her arms over her shoulders and yawned.

"I'd better light the candle," she mumbled and searched on the floor near the door. Presently a match was struck which flared up in a long, spluttering flame. This she applied to a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle. The candle glimmered feebly, unable to pierce the dark corners of the room. In addition to being a sleeping-chamber, the apartment was a lumber-room for various odds and ends, graips, forks, coils of ropes, twisters, spades and shovels. Near the door was the bed, with ticking of straw in palliasse and pillow, both wearing thin and allowing particles of the stuffing to fall out on the floor. At the foot of the

bed lay a blanket, white at one time, but now turning a dark brown.

Maureen took the bottle from the door and placed it in the center of the room and began undressing. She took off her boots and stockings, sitting on the floor as she did so. Her feet so white looked dainty and childish, despite the mire in which they trolloped all the day. She took off her blouse and gazed at her arms, nut-brown from finger-tip to elbow and lustrous as white silk from elbow to shoulder. Unloosening her brown hair and allowing it to fall in waves over her shoulder, she knelt by the bedside, pressed her head against the mattress and said her prayers.

She said her prayers in Irish, every word spreading out from the speaker and embracing some thought that had little to do with the prayer, some memory of the time that had passed when she was a little girl and her mother taught her the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary away home in the parish of Dungarrow. Maureen prayed to God with Cathal in her mind; to the Virgin, her mind teeming with memories of her own mother.

She could see her as of old, sitting by the fire, her cloud over her head and her bright needles gleaming in the lamp-light as she knitted a stocking. All day long Maureen had worked hard, giving little thought to the past; weary labor that wrings the sweat from the brow dries the tears in the eyes; the travail of the body dulls the emotion of the soul. But now when a moment's respite from the labor of her hands allowed time for thought, her soul teemed with anguish; she pressed her little brown hands together and wept.

"Mother, I'm not forgettin' ye!" she sobbed in a feeble voice that floated like a whisper into the gloom. "Ye're with me always in me mind, mother. Always, always!"

Thought ebbed away from the girl, passing into everything around her. The reflection of the candle on the wall danced in a thousand little ripples of light. Her soul went out and became part of the radiance; the girl went with it; she swayed and danced in delirious fancy, nodded, courtesied, sank into a hollow of bliss and splendor, strove to

rise again, but being unable to do so, the girl sank into an easy and blissful slumber.

She awoke with a start, feeling that something terrible was about to happen. The candle was still flaring weakly, and the dim glimmering played on the wall over the bed. A cold wind blew from somewhere chilling her arms and legs. She rose shivering, conscious that something foreign was near, and turned round, to see Bob Baxter, who was in the room behind her.

"What are you wantin' here?" she gasped, overcome with fright and shame. With her shoulder naked, her chemise open at the breast, she felt as if she would sink through the floor. The blood mantled her face and pulsed through her temples as if to burst the veins that confined it.

"If you want me to do anything, I'll be ready in a minit, but leave the room," she cried piteously, pulling the front of her chemise together.

"Maureen, wee Maureen!" said the man in a thick voice, his small eyes blinking and his loose lower lip hanging as if suspended from a string. He stood in the center of the apartment, which, being a very small one, placed him within arm's reach of Maureen. The whole atmosphere of the place was impregnated with the smell of souring whisky.

"Maureen, Maureen!" he went on, in the same drunken voice. "Wee Maureen, the Donegal! That's what I want! Wee Maureen."

The girl lifted the blanket from the bed, and wrapped it round her shoulder. Then she reached for her boots.

"It's yer supper that ye're wantin'," she said. "I'll make it for ye when I get my boots on."

"Supper," said Baxter, rolling his head and wrinkling his brows. "Supper. I don't want supper. I want Maureen, wee Maureen, the Donegal!"

"Well, I'm here," said Maureen, frightened, but feeling that it was best to humor the man. "Is it supper that ye're wantin'?"

"I don't want supper," he repeated. "Curses on supper! I want Maureen, wee Maureen, the Donegal. Not

in bed and it's two o'clock in the mornin'. Time to get up. Every night, every night, Maureen. D'you sleep like that every night, Maureen!"

The girl fixed a horrified stare on the man, her eyes wide open and thoughts of something horrid surging through her mind. If she could only get past the man and out she could run away. But that was impossible; he stood between her and the door, a hideous smile, brutal and cunning, the smile of a bird of prey thickening his besotted features.

"What do you want in here, Mr. Baxter?" cried Maureen in a strange, strangled voice, as if some one had clutched her throat. "Go away at once. Go away. It's not yer place to be in here at all."

She drew herself back to the bed, tightened the shawl round her shoulder and faced the man, looking like some beautiful animal at bay. Her hair, taking on a silken sheen in every tress, swelling out here in a brilliant luster and sinking down there in the dim satiny fold of a curl, fell over her white neck and hung in wavy lines over her cheeks and brow.

"Little Maureen! Maureen the Donegal!" articulated the man, his voice choking as if he were swallowing something, his small, flesh-padded eyes glinting with a gleam of brutal animal passion. "Not in bed, Maureen, not in bed, Maureen, ye little Donegal."

He groped out for her as if he were blind, and one hand fumbled at her shawl while the other pressed its fingers through her hanging hair. Maureen sank on the bed, ducked quickly as he tried to clutch her, and got to the floor again.

"Ah, Maureen, you're cute," he said with a leer, straightening himself sharply and getting between the girl and the door. "Ah, Maureen. Thought I was drunk, did you! Thought you'd play tricks with me, Donegal. I have you here. Look here, Maureen, I don't mean any harm. I'm all alone in the world and you're all on your own. Don't be angry with me, Maureen. Just come here and sit down, or better get into bed . . ."

The candle flame danced evilly as it swooned and recovered its presence on the lip of the bottle. It was dying, going out, and presently the room would be in darkness. This thought surged up in the brain of the girl. She fixed a terrified look on the man, at the mighty form glowering large in the dim light, and its shadow, big and inconceivably monstrous, glooming the wall at his back. Just at the same moment, in the maze of horror, Maureen saw something glitter like a star on the wall to her left. It was the large shawing knife which she had used in the turnip field that day. Bending on the weapon as a hawk swoops on a lark she caught the haft in her hand and slipped it from the cleek on which it hung.

"Mr. Baxter," said Maureen, her eyes narrowing to a point and speaking through her set teeth, "if you don't get out iv the room at once, I'll drive this right through you."

Grinding his black uneven teeth as if chewing coal, he stepped back a pace, touched the door with his back and stood stock-still facing the girl, shades of uneasiness, discomfiture and uncertainty darkening his face.

"Maureen, I didn't mean what you think," he stammered. " 'Twas the drink that got to my head."

"Then leave me to meself now," said the girl, leaning towards him, her little knuckles white as she gripped the knife haft, her eyes round and flashing. "Go out iv the room at once and leave me be."

"Aye, leave you!" said the man in a peculiar, deliberate tone as he put his hand on the door-knob. "But you're so nice and all alone, too. Put down the knife, Maureen, and listen."

"There's nothin' that I want to hear from ye, Mr. Baxter, after what ye've done," said Maureen, feeling as if something in her head was being drawn taut and was on the point of breaking. She held out a limp, beseeching hand to her master. "Leave me be," she begged piteously. "It's not right, Mr. Baxter. Leave me to meself!"

"But you'll not chase me out, Maureen," he asked in a hoarse voice. "I'll leave you be now, if you promise that

ye'll not always put me away. Will you promise, Maureen?''

''I promise,'' said the girl. ''Some other time, but not now.''

''Good night then, Maureen,'' said the man, drawing the door open. ''Some other time, Maureen. Mind that; it's a promise.''

She did not reply. The candle gave a last faint flicker and died. Maureen rushed to the door, still holding the shawing knife, and drew the bolt. Then shivering and sobbing she knelt down and said a prayer, her ears open to the noise made by the staggering man in an adjacent bedroom.

For a long time Maureen remained in this attitude like a beaten animal afraid that the slightest movement may bring back the punishment that is over for the moment. When she got to her feet, she groped in the darkness for her check kerchief, spread it out on the floor and tied her few articles of clothing in it.

When the first gray light of the dawn streamed through the window, she unbarred the door silently and went into the kitchen, her bundle under her arm and her shawl wrapped round her shoulders. Not a sound was to be heard; the place was in absolute stillness. The girl opened the door, shut it quietly behind her and was in the steading yard.

Maureen's second term of service was at an end.

IX

Maureen, the proud, radiant, inaccessible Maureen, took to the road again, tired and penniless, but nevertheless filled with that sense of independence which comes to those who have performed an act that is noble and honorable. The pure girl had defended her honor, protected herself against the advances of her master. The innate delicacy common to her race, the sure flame of undying desire, its gratification renounced because of a promise given and the religious faith that gleamed steadily in a heart stricken

with the misfortune of existence, armed Maureen against the man, and added strength to her inherent resolves. On the previous night she would have murdered the man, sinned, if any extreme taken to protect that which was her soul, her honor, the pinnacle on which she stood, could be catalogued in the category of sin. Now as she recalled the incidents of the night her own memory had nothing to call forth in impeachment of her action. To Maureen virtue had its own discretion, innate purity its own bulwark, frankness its own method of thwarting its enemy's flight.

But even as she had shrunk on the previous night from the embraces of the drunken man, she now shrank from the remembrance of them. As she walked along her mother seemed to be very near her, the stay of salvation and the plank to which she could cling in the deadly shipwreck of circumstance.

All the pride of her nature rose up within her as she paced along the road, barefooted, her feet scratched and sore, her little check bundle under her arm. But she did not feel weary; a power peculiar to the innocent and good heartened her, toning her spirit to the highest pitch, bracing the old, calm purposes, counseling endurance when the load lay heavy, and resignation when troubles beat fiercely against her.

She skirted a village, walking through a miry field, and struck the road further along. The causeway was very dry, littered with a fine white gravel which the cold hard wind blew across the countryside and whisked against Maureen's face. It was now ten o'clock in the morning.

She had no idea where she was bound for, but she wanted to find a place where she would be taken on as a servant. She was well aware that at this season of the year the demand for servants was small. Coming as it did between the fairs the farmers would have their staffs, and even now those taken for the hay and harvest season were not busily engaged. The back of the working season was broken, the crops were for the most part saved, the haggards stocked and the yield of the potato fields binned and pitted.

Through this country where no prospects fronted her, Maureen pursued her way, on, on, somewhere, until she could find a haven and refuge. It all rested with Him and He would not forsake her in the hour of stress and tribulation.

Now and again she stopped, put her hand in her bosom and pressed the scapular which had been given her months before. In some way this gave her hope for the future, a confidence in herself and trust in the ultimate attainment of all that her heart desired, safety, surety, and a home.

At noon she breasted the summit of a hill. Here she sat down and looked at the country which lay around her. Behind were the woods, plantations and homes of a rich, lush country which she had just passed through. A river, heavy-bosomed and quiet, slept as it seemed in its bed, too lazy to move, to sparkle or sing. To the prospect this supine belt of water added a tone of stateliness and aloofness. As Maureen looked at it, she shuddered as if an icy hand had suddenly laid itself on her heart.

She turned to the road in front of her that led down into a fertile valley where the corn was stacked in good, comfortable, warm heaps and gave a touch of something restful and serene to the country. Here, near at hand, was a limewashed cottage, snugly thatched, with a curl of smoke rising from its chimney. Farther along could be seen the road twisting round a spinney, rising to a lift in the braes, showing straight and white in places, again twisting in a sinuous line, dipping and disappearing, only to rise into view again farther along. Finally away in the far distance it lost itself altogether like a stream in the sand. A row of dark hills whose contour lined a pale sky closed the perspective.

"The hills," said Maureen, with a sigh. "They're like Donegal, so snug and so warm." She was not in reality thinking of the hills but of the glens which they hid, the homes and the people whom she knew.

She got to her feet again and went towards the cottage at the foot of the slope.

A woman was standing at the door shaking a checked petticoat in the breeze.

"Well, and who are you at all?" she asked as Maureen came abreast. A housekeeper finding a burglar in his bedroom might address him in a similar manner.

"I'm a Donegal girl, dacent woman," said Maureen.

She hung the petticoat in the crook of her arm, rubbed her chin with a ridgy and gnarry hand, dry as an ancient turf, and stared at the girl.

"Well, I thought be the first look at ye that ye were a poor woman or worse than that, a tinker," she said. "And ye're a Donegal?"

"I am," said Maureen.

"Where from?"

"Dungarrow."

"Whereabouts there?"

"Meenaroodagh," said Maureen, hope filling her heart, for the woman spoke as if she knew the place.

"Indeed then," said the woman. "I come from near there meself, but I don't know ye. My name afore I got married on a man was Norah Beeragh. And yer own name is?"

"Maureen O'Malley," was the reply. Maureen had often heard of Norah, the daughter of Coy Fergus Beeragh, but had never seen her. Norah had gone away beyond the mountains years ago, got married and had never returned home since then.

"So you're Maureen O'Malley," said Norah, looking the girl up and down with sharp, shifty eyes. "Just the same in the turn iv the face and the way you hold your shoulders," she went on, probably tracing a resemblance between Maureen and her mother. "Just the very cut of yer mother, that I knew so well and me wee," she said. "And ye'll be full iv money now?" she questioned.

"I'm lookin' for a job," said Maureen. "And I haven't one penny piece."

"Tell me that!" said the woman with a dry, sharp laugh.

"It's true," said Maureen.

"Well, ye weren't long in spendin' what ye got," said Norah. "And it would be a good penny and all from what they say."

"I don't know at all what ye're manin'," said Maureen, a puzzled look showing on her face.

"Don't know what I mane and you all in the papers!"

"In the papers," Maureen exclaimed, turning white. "What am I in the papers for?"

"Well, you're the one to ask me that!" said Norah curtly, a certain tone of distrust and suspicion toning her voice. "And after makin' good money out iv it too."

"What am I in the papers for?" Maureen asked again. "I don't know what ye're manin' at all."

" 'Twas because ye're the informer and got that woman Thornton into jail because ye told on her," said Norah. "It's a way iv makin' money iv course, but it's not to the likin' iv all and every one. I wouldn't sink meself to the doin' iv it."

"But it was for the childre," Maureen protested. "The poor things were gettin' starved and them so cold that it would break the heart iv a stone to keep lookin' at them."

"And ye got yerself in the papers," said Norah, suspicion at an unwonted happening filling her voice.

The world outside her own was one of vagueness and mystery; the fact of appearing in the papers augured something dark and doubtful, guilt, error and crime. Dungarrow itself got into the papers now and again, but always in a dark light, murder, death, theft. When these events occurred and the law took its cumbrous course, papers were bought, eagerly read and discussed, weighed in the parish gatherings, which having their own code of morality came to an ultimate abstract conclusion that nothing good will ever come of those who get into the papers. Coy Fergus Beeragh was adamant in this belief; Norah when young and malleable accepted it, unconsciously and without question, as the browning corn accepts the tone of autumn. Even now with outlook contained and thought untraveled, she still clung to an ancient fixity of values when the subject of papers came before her. Be-

sides, was not Maūreen the daughter of Kathleen O'Malley, a girl base begotten who judged by accident of birth was fit for any misdemeanor? That she should be in the papers was something which might be expected.

"Well, and if I did get in the papers there's nothin' to be ashamed iv by that," said Maureen after a moment's silence.

"No, nothin' at all, if ye look at it in that way," said Norah in a tone of scornful superiority that was in a measure pleasant because it showed the woman's ability to rise above things that would be talked of all over the world. "It's the way ye look at it that makes the difference. And now where are ye for at all?" she inquired curiously.

"I don't know," said Maureen helplessly. "Keep walkin' till I can get a job."

"And far enough that'll be," said Norah cruelly. "If people know ye for what ye are, God help ye. They're not goin' to give ye board and money if ye'll be tellin' on them when their back's turned on ye."

A moment ago Maureen longed for her own townland, or at least for the sight of a person from that arm of the world. This was suddenly granted her, but now, her heart swelling with rage and resentment, she looked Norah Beeragh between the eyes.

"God forbid that I'd ever ask anything from the like iv yerself, Norah Beeragh," she said. "If Dungarrow people were all like you, I'd be pleased never to see one of them again."

Norah was really in her way a generous and big-hearted woman, ready to do a kindness even to Maureen O'Malley, but she felt that this kindness would not be appreciated at its just value if some opprobrium was not cast on its recipient before given. In fact if Maureen showed that she realized her own unworthiness as well as the superiority of Norah Beeragh, Norah would have taken her into her house and treated her well, hoping of course that the girl would feel very kindly towards her as a generous person.

A certain fact should be mentioned here, as it may have

something to do with Norah Beeragh's bearing at the moment. When a young girl, Norah Beeragh and Kathleen O'Malley were rivals on many a dancing floor, but Kathleen always came off victorious. In fact it was said that Norah, though a comely girl, had nothing more to her glory than the first pick of Kathleen O'Malley's leavings. Women never forget facts like these.

"And thank God that all the people from Dungarrow are not like you, Maureen O'Malley," Norah returned spitefully. "Now ye're off and away, but what ye're up to is sure not to be good."

Maureen, holding her head high, left the irate woman. Once or twice she looked back impenitently, not a little elated at what she had said. In fact she was glad at what she had done. She had not asked anything from the woman. She was as good as Norah, maybe better, if it went to that. Maureen had not a penny, but that and all she owed nobody anything. She was beholden to no one. People were cruel when they might be kind. It costs nothing to be kind. She looked back again, still impenitent, but when she saw that a turn of the road cut her off from the house of Norah Beeragh, she sat down, overcome, and started crying.

Late in the evening she reached the mouth of a valley that ran into the hilly country. On the braes which rose from the road on either side she saw houses, thatched and limewashed, running in straggly lines almost as far as the eye could reach. She rested on a dyke and took in the scene in front of her, feeling somehow that here was a place where refuge and rest would be hers. It looked in a measure like a glen of the home country. A feeling of safety welled up in her being, giving her a certain happiness which had not been hers for many a long day.

A noise from the road behind attracted her attention, and she saw a cart coming towards her, a man sitting on the front board, his coat off and his hat pulled down well over his head.

"Good evenin' to ye, decent girl," he said, stopping his horse when he came abreast and looking at Maureen. He

was a tall man, squarely built despite his height, with a short neck and a low forehead. His cheeks were brown as old copper, a drooping mustache hid his mouth; his eyes, bright and very clear, denoted kindness.

"Good evenin', sir," said Maureen.

"Are ye goin' my way at all?" asked the man, pulling the reins tightly to take the horse back from the side of the road where it edged in to crop the hedgerows. "If ye are, get up here and I'll give ye a bit iv a ride."

"Thank ye, kindly, sir," said Maureen, "but I don't know where I'm goin' to at all."

"Have ye left yer place?" asked the man.

"I have that," said Maureen. "I didn't like it at all, and now I'm out iv it."

"Was it near-by here that ye were?" asked the driver.

"More than a day's walk away," said the girl. "Or more anyway than a person would care to walk in a day, for I've been on me feet since the shriek iv dawn."

"Walkin' all the time?"

"All the time."

"And what do ye intend to do?" asked the man in a curious voice. "Nobody's wantin' people to work on their land now as far as I know. The crops are in, and why shouldn't they be with the good weather that God has sent us this year? And where will ye be puttin' up for the night with not a place to go to?"

"I don't know," said Maureen simply.

"Well, I don't know either," said the man in serious tones, as if Maureen had asked him his opinion of her plight and the best means of extricating herself. In fact he spoke as if one point was clear anyway, that he must help the girl by every means in his power.

"Well, I don't know at all," he said, after a moment's silence, giving the reins a sharp tug as if the horse was in some way responsible for Maureen's troubles. "I don't know, but up on the cart behind me with ye and we'll have a talk about it."

He lowered the tailboard and helped Maureen to mount.

Then he handed her a few bags which were lying on the floor of the cart.

"Sit on these and it'll be aisier for ye," he said. "There's a bad road in front iv us over Corngarrow, for it's hilly and stony with little or no footin' for a horse be day let alone be night, and it now getting dark on it."

He sat down, tied the reins round the thill of the cart, and lit his pipe.

"Well, well," he said as a sort of preliminary sigh. "And it was the grand day. I've been to Omagh and back, and where have ye come from?"

"Newtonsmith," said the girl.

"And tramped all the way?" he ejaculated.

"All the way," Maureen replied. "It's far, isn't it?"

"Far," said the man with a mighty laugh. "If your own feet can't tell the far it is, it's more than I can do with me tongue. It's twenty-five miles, Irish. I know the country well enough and I'm not going to hear any one say that it's less than twenty-five miles, Irish. *D-tuigean thi Gaelig?*"

"*D-tuigen,*" Maureen replied.

"So you're Donegal," said the man, assured of this by the girl's knowledge of Irish and her way of speaking English.

"That I am," said the girl.

"And yer name will be?"

"Norah Cassidy," said Maureen, seeking security from the papers which might even travel this far in a lie.

"Well, my name's McKenna," said the man, feeling that he should show his courtesy by a return of confidence. "I'm a married man and a farmer. I have a Donegal girl in my employ now, and it's more than one iv them that I've had. And good workers they are and they save their money and send it home like decent cubs to their fathers and mothers. Now," he said, feeling that he might venture another question, "now, is your father and mother livin'?"

"Dead, God rest them," said Maureen.

"And you've brothers and sisters?"

"Not a one," said Maureen.

"Ah! dear me!" said the man. "It's hard to be without a friend in the world at all. And what was the reason ye left your last place?"

"I didn't like them that were there," said Maureen.

"Protestants?" asked the man.

"I don't think that he was one thing or the other," said Maureen. "There was nobody in the house but a man, and I ran away from him!"

"Ah, indeed!" said McKenna with a nod of understanding. "There are men like that. And what is his name at all?"

"Robert Baxter!"

"Ah!" said McKenna. "I've heard iv him, a man that wants to get his neck twisted off iv him."

"And that woman about that district, too, Mrs. Thornton," said McKenna, after a short silence. "Never saw her, did you?"

"I saw her," said Maureen, feeling suddenly warm, though a moment before she shivered with cold.

"She was a bad woman," said McKenna. "I read all about her in the papers and the way that the Donegal girl showed her up. Bully on the girl!"

That morning when she disclosed the fact to Norah Beeragh that she was the girl in Mrs. Thornton's employ, Maureen was charged with being an informer; now when her action came in for approval she knew that in claiming it as her own she would be charged as a liar. She was Maureen O'Malley and not—not—

Her mind groped wildly after the name which she had falsely given. But she could not remember it.

WHEN I WAS WEE

'Twas me was the divil when I was wee,
Full iv capers and up for fun,
And there wasn't one in the parish like me,
And dear! how my two bare feet could run
When I was wee!

Fetch or fellow iv me to get
Ye'd wander far on either hand.
But that and all ye'd never set
Eyes on the bate iv yer own townland,
When I was wee!

Ah! sharp the tip iv the tongue that's old,
And white the laugh when the lips fall in—
It's the young to laugh and the aged to scold,
The old to pray and the young to sin,
And I was wee.

And ye want to go out to the dance, avic,
As if ye have nothin' else to do?
And me the poor old man on a stick,
And once I could step on the floor like you
When I was wee!

CHAPTER VI

Sein Feiners

I

THE time was late evening in early autumn, time for those weary from one day's hard work and with a day's heavy work facing them at dawn to be in bed. The weather was standing good in Dungarrow, the turf crinkling on the spread-fields, the lush meadows calling for the sickle and the heavy-eared corn turning brown on the braes. The yield of the year promised well in Meenaroodagh and Meenarood and in all the townlands of Dungarrow from Crinnan resting on the hills to Drimeeney with its toes in Gweenora Bay.

But ten o'clock of this evening saw light in the home of Condy Heelagh, the cobbler, and a number of the neighbors were in there sitting on chairs and forms, their faces dim in the smoke of many a pipe. Coy Fergus Beeragh was there, Cathal Cassidy, Mr. Brogan, Columb Ruagh Keeran, Corney McKelvie, the son of Hannah McKelvie. This boy had been in the English Army but was now discharged a victim of gas poisoning on the Somme.

Little had been changed in the appointments of the house since the memorable evening on which Mr. Brogan visited it twenty years before. An ancient fowling-piece, rusty and cobwebby, which stuck between rafters and scraws on that date was there still, but under it, pinned to the wall, was something of newer date, which told of a country becoming superbly conscious of its own nationality and its own soul. New kindling was thrown on a dulled fire and the kindling took flame. Public opinion was moved. The people saw their way clear to something great

and ultimate, the realization of an end, the freedom of their country. The old language was now spoken in fair and field, the feet timed to an ancient measure in their national dances. The Sein Fein movement was destined to mark a great epoch in the history of the ancient race.

Pinned to the wall under the fowling-piece was the photo of the man, James Connoly, who gave his life for an ideal in the Easter rising in Dublin. Under the photo was a trenchant truth scrawled in ink: Murdered by a foreign power to make the world safe for democracy.

Beneath this was a parody on a poem once written by T. D. Sullivan:

"Freedom is a holy thing,
For so our gracious rulers say—
And what they say it's me to sing
In quite a legal, proper way.
They praise it up with all their might
And praise the men who seek it, too,
Provided all the row and fight
Is out in Belgium. Thiggin tu?[1]

Peggy Ribbig sat in the corner, telling stories of cows that were elf-shot, of churning that brought no butter, of awlths that were haunted and raths sacred to the gentle people. On her head she wore a white bonnet with a frilled border; her supple hands with the black finger-nails and clay-lined cuticles busy at the knitting. She rocked to and fro, the stool beneath her creaking, and her voice never a moment still flowed steadily out with her stories.

Those around her listened attentively, the older people nodding approvingly at times, while the young, sitting on the hearth, kept looking upwards, their mouths a little parted and their eyes alight with interest.

Cathal Cassidy was sitting near the wall, his chair tilted back, resting against the whitewashed wall under the sooty lamp, his legs stretched out straight from the knee downward and the toes of his boots touching the floor. He had a full pipe in his mouth, the taut skin of his face showed like polished bronze in the reflection of the lamp.

[1] *Thiggin tu?* Do you understand? Colloquially—See my point?

"I bet ye that ye don't hold with these ould stories iv the times that wor," said Coy Fergus Beeragh, taking the pipe from his mouth and spitting in the bowl. He looked at Cathal as he spoke.

"I do and I don't," said the young man. "With all respect to Peggy, I don't believe in the taking iv butter away from the churn as she tells about it."

Coy pressed the tobacco down the heel of his pipe with a miry thumb and put the pipe in his pocket.

"That's the way with the young nowadays," said the old man, fixing one eye on Peggy. "They go on believin' anything but what's right. Cathal Cassidy doesn't believe anything by the way iv him, and Corney McKelvie believes everything that's not good for any one to give an ear to."

"That's the truth," said Coy.

"There let them, then," said Peggy. "They'll one day get past that if they live long enough. It's turning Sassenach that every one is that's growing up now. Don't ye think so yerself, Mr. Brogan?"

Eamon na Sgaddan, on a chair near the door, unable to find a word suitable for the occasion at that moment, nodded his head knowingly as a sign that without great consideration he would not disagree with Peggy Ribbig's assertion.

"Everything is changing, and for the worse," said young Corney McKelvie, who, although having fought two years for England was now a Republican in favor of Sein Fein. "Even this sector that is so far away from the influence of the Sassenach is getting into demned English ways. It was different thirty years ago. Then there was something Irish about Dungarrow; some customs of the ancient Gaelic state remained here. People worked together to do things and paid in kind. Neighbors helped one another to cut turf; now a man pays so much a day. You give a man Sassenach money to thatch a house. Whoever paid a man to thatch a house years back? Ye gave him a creel of pratees or a load of hay or some souvenir like that. Then a poor bloke got a bit and sup, and the door wasn't

hasped at night so that he couldn't come in if he was passing. Now ye'll not see a demned beggar on the road at all—''

''And thank God!'' said Peggy with a sigh as if mourning for what the beggars had cost her in their day. ''The beggars were a curse on the place, gallivanting all over the country and them up to all sorts iv capers. 'Twas gowpins iv pratees, gugeens iv milk, meal and what not to them at all hours iv the day. And not alone that, but shakedowns at night and them scratchin' themselves under the window the way that ye couldn't get a wink iv sleep afeeard that they might go away with half iv the house in their mauleen or else set you and yours on fire afore they went. I couldn't stand them, the Friels with their kettles and the McGrorys with their donkeys and maybe them stealin' a young sucker or a bag iv turf under your very nose. They were heavy on the goodwill iv the parish, John the Jumper, Biddy Fly, Meehal Dearg, Hudy Sowans and the rest iv them. Are you one of these Sein Feiners, Fergus Donnel?'' she asked, looking at a young boy of seventeen who sat near her.

''I am,'' said Fergus. ''And it's what everybody should be now. All the young men in the parish are Sein Feiners, every one iv them.''

''But they weren't in the old times,'' said the woman. ''And they had more sense then than they have now, more sense in every way. Maybe they hadn't as much money, but they couldn't expect that with no war in foreign parts to help them. But what they had they kept, and it's not that that they can do now. Are we going to get the Old Age Pension if they keep on in this way?''

''Of course you will,'' said Fergus. ''It's not the Sassenach that will pay it to you then, but the Irish.''

''Then the back of my hand to it,'' said Peggy. ''If I wait till the Irish people pay me anything I'll go down into the grave without gettin' it.''

''The times that used to be were bad times,'' said Coy Fergus Beeragh. ''But now we're better off than we ever

were in all our lives and 'leave well enough alone' is what I say and not have this speech-makin' and marchin' and drillin' all over the country. A lot of plaishams is what the young people are coming to. It's the war that'll come to the parish iv Dungarrow afore they finish their capers. As it is now they're at the back iv the hills at Clyarra guarding the railway bridge at night with swords and guns."

"And maybe it wouldn't do as much harm as all that," said Condy Heelagh from the fireside. He spoke of war. "If it comes at all the boys will be wantin' guns to fight with, and I think that I might get rid iv that one that's up on the rafters." He pointed at the ancient fowling-piece. "It has been there in this house for long and many's a day, and when it's used with a fistful of slugs in it, and a plug iv paper, it can scatter death round it for half a mile. And it's aisy to shoot out iv it, too. One pull on the tricker and if the cap is a good one it can fill anything that we fire at full iv lead. Now if the war comes, Cathal Cassidy, how much could I get for that gun?"

"God save us from a war," said Peggy Ribbig, crossing herself. "What would be the good iv sellin' that gun when they would stop the Old Age Pension? And then we'd have the beggars back here as well, rakin' all over the country as bad as they were in the days that's past. Dirty rascals they wor, them iv old times."

"They're gone and let them rest," said Condy Heelagh from the fire, his coat off and his shirt riding up round his neck where it formed in folds like a muffler. Out from the folds rose his narrow, weasel-like head, the eyes blinking craftily and his nose drooling. "They're gone, and let them rest," he repeated in a squeaky voice. "We've got to live, and that's what matters."

"Aye, we've got to live," said Cathal Cassidy.

"And maybe die if the war comes here," said Condy Heelagh, his parchment face forming into a smile. "Do ye think, Cathal, that the war will come here?"

"It may be that," said Cathal. "One never knows

what may come to pass now. One day it's shootin' here and another day it's shootin' there, and one never knows what's goin' to happen next."

"I know what would happen next if I got behind Sergeant Kinnear iv Stranarachary some dark night," said Columb Ruagh from the corner where he was sitting near the window. "It would be the Sergeant's death, the black spawn iv the divil. It would be one blow on the back iv the head, and his brains would be lyin' all over the road."

"Wouldn't ye give him a round iv shot?" said Condy Heelagh, again fixing his eye on the ancient gun.

"Not me," Columb growled, shaking his head. "Wouldn't waste shot on the bastard. A stick is too good for him."

"But it's wrong, takin' a man's life," said Cathal Cassidy in a low voice. "It won't help us if that's done. And besides, the Sergeant is an Irishman. We want him with us, like every other Irishman in the country. When we succeed in our fight he will be with us, one of ourselves. If we kill him it won't help us either in the eyes of the world or in the eyes iv God."

"God will never blame a man for puttin' a policeman out iv the world," said Columb fervently, spitting on the floor. "Will he now, Eamon na Sgaddan?"

"I'm sure he won't," said Mr. Brogan with a nervous smile. Mr. Brogan would not have come to Condy Heelagh's if he had known that Columb Ruagh was there. Why Columb came that night to Condy Heelagh's was not known to Mr. Brogan. Columb seldom left his own townland in the hills where he carried on a great business in illicit distillation. He was a Sein Feiner, and the Sein Feiners bought the potheen. He was also a waterkeeper. This was a blind, for a waterkeeper is above suspicion in Governmental eyes. Columb was now a rich man, and the Crinnan hills were white with his wool.

"There, now, what did I tell ye?" said Columb Ruagh with the voice of a diplomat who has made a master stroke in business and looking at Mr. Brogan. "There, now, what did I tell ye?" he repeated, appealing to the house.

"Didn't I say that Eamon na Sgaddan would be the one to side with me? Ye are a man, Eamon, that's what ye are, one iv the best, the best in the whole country. And me, Eamon na Sgaddan, I always say what I think and what more can a man do? Can any man do more, Eamon na Sgaddan?"

"Of course not," said Eamon, evidently ill at ease, but smiling as he spoke.

"Iv course not, Eamon na Sgaddan," Columb went on, remorselessly pursuing the subject. "We know one another, the two iv us, and there's no secrets. Some call ye Mr. Brogan, but I say, damn Mr. Brogan. Eamon na Sgaddan's good enough for me, as it should be, for we know one another. We've done our graft like men where men are needed for a job. It doesn't matter a damn where we did it, whether it was throwin' dung off iv a wagon or any other business. Isn't that right, Eamon na Sgaddan?"

"That's right, Mr. Keeran," said poor Eamon, his face a pallid green. What Columb was driving at he could not fathom. Mr. Brogan at that moment wished that he was back home. Cassie Shemus Meehal, though quieter now than in the early years of her married life, was yet a force to be reckoned with. Still, Mr. Brogan feared Columb Ruagh even more than he feared his own wife.

"Iv course it's right, Eamon na Sgaddan," Columb said maliciously. "I'm seldom wrong. I mind when I met ye in Scotland for the first time, and me on the tramp lookin' for a job and yerself strong in business, 'twas 'How are ye, Columb?' when ye clapped yer eyes on me, and glad ye were to see a towney iv yer own. Every man his due, Eamon, every man his due, and credit to them that never turns their back on a towney. Ye were on yer business, and what yer business was I'm not goin' to say, but it was somethin' that brought ye in money, and ye weren't slow in helpin' me. And I was wantin' help at the time. Now where was it that we met?" Columb inquired, closing one eye and looking at Eamon.

Mr. Brogan winced, and a sickly smile overspread his features. Peggy Ribbig, not as deaf as a woman of seventy

might well be, ceased her knitting and edged her stool nearer to Mr. Brogan.

"And once ye were a great dancer," Columb went on in the same slow tone of malicious banter, without waiting for Eamon to answer his last question. "I mind the time that ye could fut an Alaman with the best iv them, and kick the riggin' off iv a house in a six-hand reel. Where was it that I seen ye dance last?" queried the red man, wrinkling his forehead as if a thought had escaped him. "Oh! I mind it now," he went on. " 'Twas the night the dance was givin' at Neddy Og's, nineteen years Candlemas comin'—"

"Last Candlemas," Peggy Ribbig interrupted. "I mind the night well, and the boys comin' home in the mornin' singin' as if they would pull down the sky with their noise, the vagabonds."

"Some iv them went home singin', I'll allow that," said Columb with the air of a man who is going to impart a wonderful piece of news to his audience. "Some iv them went home singin', and some iv them weren't able to go home at all with the drink in them, and other iv them went home with the girls."

"That's true," said Condy Heelagh, glancing in turn at Eamon na Sgaddan and Columb Ruagh. "That's true and goes without sayin'. Always the Dungarrow boys were the divils for the girls whether they were drunk or sober—"

"A true word," said Columb Ruagh. "When they were sober they could take care iv themselves and not run into mischief. But if a man's drunk it's hard to know what capers he's up to. Don't ye think so now, Eamon na Sgaddan?"

"It's maybe true," said Eamon in a whisper, his hands trembling and a moisture showing on his forehead.

"There, he agrees with me again," said Columb sweetly, resting his elbows on his knees, gripping his stick with both hands and fixing a scrutinizing glance on Mr. Brogan. "He knows things just like me, for both of us have been beyont the water and we've done business there. What

the business was doesn't matter. But we've done it, and that's as much as any one can expect iv a man. Now isn't that right, Coy Fergus Beeragh?''

Columb appealed to the old man who now sat in a corner near the kitchen bed, his close-set eyes, filmy with years, fixed vacantly on the throng that sat round the fire. In one trembling hand he held a spill and was on the point of lighting the pipe which he held between his toothless gums.

''What was it that ye said, Columb Ruagh?'' he inquired in a wheezy voice. ''It's hard iv hearin' that I am, and who can blame me and me over eighty?''

''But there's life in the old dog yet,'' said Condy Heelagh. ''It's many years that's in front iv ye this day, Coy Fergus Beeragh. I saw ye yesterday out herdin' the cows, and says I to Peggy, and the two iv us lookin' at ye as ye ran after the old brannat meealan chasin' her from the corn, 'Coy can shake his legs yet,' says I, 'just like a two-year-old!' Them were my words, Coy, and Peggy can tell ye the same. Ye can run as quick the day as ye did on the day that we were chased by the gaugers up be the back iv Binbawn.''

''And that was on the year iv Dony Faddan's death,'' said Coy, lighting his pipe and pressing the tobacco down the bowl with his thumb.

''But it's not yerself that can call Dony Faddan's death to mind, is it?'' asked Peggy Ribbig. ''It's long gone the time since Dony, God rest him, died.''

''I mind it as well as yesterday,'' said Coy, sitting back against the bed. ''It was Lammas night and me only a wee boy, hardly the height iv two turf lyin' flat one on top iv the other. Well, as I was sayin', 'twas Lammas night, the night iv the fair iv Doochary. A good fair it was, too, I mind, not like the fairs that's in it nowadays, with rannies iv stock, sheep with hair on their backs instead iv wool, and cows with udders no bigger than bockans. Call them cows, indeed. At the fair of Stranarachary six months past come next Thursday I saw a comin' cow that I would as soon look for the milk from her teats when she calved as I would from the legs iv a pot. 'Twas Micky Hudagh Roe

that was selling her, too. But his holdin' could send out cow beasts years back. I mind twenty years past the year Searlas Dhu O'Friel was drownded—"

"But what about Dony Faddan?" asked Fergus Donnel, who with face dark blue like a sun-burned potato was sitting under the chimney brace, his chair tilted back against the wall on which his head was resting.

"Ah! poor Dony, God rest him!" said Coy, slipping easily back to the story which he had begun. " 'Twas Lammas night. And the rain! It was comin' down heavens hard, and the parish was one flood. The worst flood that ever was, that one. Young Peadar Niall, him that died three years ago, was almost drownded that night coming home from the dance given by Shemus Phelim away back behind Sliab League. He was on the way home in the early morning afore it cleared, and comin' across the Owenawadda at the Meenahalla Cloghan he slipped into the river. How he got out bates me."

"I mind young Peadar and him almost gettin' lost in the river," said Peggy. "And it's three years gone since he died. One wouldn't think it, would they now? And him that healthy on it, too, when he went, God rest him!"

"The time will come on every one iv us, no matter what the health is," said old Coy. "The best thatchin' will go with the years, no matter how it's done. It's the years that always tell in the long run, and if a man lives well he can die easy. That's me own opinion, Columb Ruagh, if a man lives well and does his best to himself and neighbors near and far he can die aisy." The old man recalling the question of Columb Ruagh, five minutes previously, had now given answer.

"There, ye see, Eamon na Sgaddan," said Columb, still leaning on his stick and looking at Mr. Brogan. "There's the answer to that question. Coy himself believes that when a man does his bit iv business and does it well it's as much as any one can expect iv him. That's a fair answer to a straight question, and the answer was made by a dacent man. 'If he lives well,' says Coy, and that's the point.

A man may do his best in a lot iv things and be far behind the line with other things. I've seen many a man like that in me travels. There was one laddybuck that I knew, and him and me worked on the same shift at the Glasgow dung-coup. Maybe ye yerself saw that coup when ye were over water on business. It used to stink like a privy, and ye had to hold yer nose in yer finger when ye came next or near it. Well, I worked there, for I was out on tramp at the time and got a start on the job. But I didn't like it at all, and that with me the rough customer that I am. But I had to stick it and do me best, and this fellow worked with me doin' the same sort iv job, and him a man that had the learnin'. Where he came from I don't know. Ye never ask questions to hear lies beyont the water.

"Well, this fellow that I'm talkin' about got into trouble with a woman," continued Columb, his eyes still fixed on Mr. Brogan. Condy Heelagh cocked up his ears, Peggy Ribbig edged her stool still closer to Columb. Coy Beeragh, hard of hearing, had dropped into the easy sleep of age and was snoring loudly. "He got into trouble with a woman, and ye know what happened?"

The man appealed to the house.

"Aye, Columb, aye," said Condy Heelagh, nodding his head sagely and wrinkling up his eyebrows. "It means only one thing that, and sometimes it's enough."

"Just so," said Peggy Ribbig, who by this time had forgotten all about her stocking. While her ears were open to every word which Columb Ruagh said, her eyes never left the face of Mr. Brogan. Cathal Cassidy, Corney McKelvie and Fergus Donnel, with pipes lit, were very quiet but obviously interested.

The face of Mr. Brogan was alternately turning white and crimson. He would have given a lot to be able to get to his feet and make his exit. But this he was unable to do. He seemed glued to his chair and sat there with his mouth open, conscious of nothing save the staring eyes and expectant faces. He could not budge an inch, move a leg or raise an arm. To do either would have been torture.

In front of him the faces whirled, swept round and round and formed into one face, red and hairy, the face of Columb Ruagh.

"And that's what happened," Columb Ruagh droned out, weighing every word as if each was of incalculable value. "That's what happened, and he was a good fellow in every other way. But it's funny the make-up iv a man, isn't it, Cathal Cassidy?"

"Of some men, I'll grant ye," Cathal replied in a very calm voice, taking his pipe from his mouth and tapping the bowl on his hand. "But the man with the funniest make-up that I know is yerself, Columb Ruagh."

"Me? How d'ye make that out?" asked Columb, scraping the floor with the tip of his stick while a wave of conflicting emotions sprang up within him, hatred, fury and a sudden desire to do some wicked deed, to grip Cathal Cassidy by the hand, twist the arm from the shoulder, just to show him that he could trample him to the ground like a worm if he desired. But the impulse was just of a moment's space. It would not serve his purpose if he fell foul of Cathal, the President of the Sein Fein Party in Dungarrow. Cathal was too well liked by the people, and at present he was worth keeping as a friend. But should Columb ever get the opportunity he would show him—but at present . . . He glanced covertly at the young man's face as if to read something from its expression, but there was nothing to be gathered from the calm, frank glance which Cathal fixed on him.

"Well, ye're a funny man the way ye take things," said Columb, doing the utmost to hide the hatred seething in his breast. "I just asked a question, Cathal Cassidy."

"Iv course ye did, Columb, and I answered it," said Cathal. "And I don't see what's funny in that," he concluded, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, it was in the way ye said it," was Columb's comment as he got to his feet, pulled the hat down on his head and placed his stick under his arm. "Well, good night to all iv ye. It will take me the best part iv an hour to get to the Crinnan cross-roads. Good night t'ye all." He

went to the door which was open and stood there for a minute looking out into the darkness.

"It's dark as the pit iv hell," he said, without looking round. "And here's somebody comin'. Good night t'ye."

The last remark was addressed to some person coming towards the house, a man with very heavy boots and a scythe over his shoulder.

"Good night t'ye," was the reply in the darkness. "Who's that that I hear speakin'? Not old Columb Ruagh surely."

"Aye, it's old Columb," said the red-haired man. "It's old Columb, Liam Logan."

"Well, it's not every night that we see yerself down here," said Liam Logan, who had just come back from the smithy of Stranarachary where he had got his scythe hung for the morrow's hay-cutting. "And I thought that every one was in their beds at this hour iv the night, too."

"There's a full house in Condy's here," said Columb, pointing over his shoulder at the lighted interior. "They're all in now, or most iv them, anyway."

"Indeed?" said Liam in a mysterious tone. "Corney McKelvie and Cathal?"

"Aye," said Columb.

At this point a number of the young men came to the door and accompanied Columb to the road.

"We'll go along a bit," said Cathal Cassidy; and Condy Heelagh, who came to the door, saw all the separate entities merge into one block of blackness as distance between them and his home increased. Then the old man went back to his room and sat down by the fire. Coy Fergus Beeragh was still asleep, Mr. Brogan had disappeared and Peggy Ribbig was on her knees saying her Rosary.

Coy Fergus Beeragh opened his eyes lazily and looked round.

"It's time to be getting home," he said. "Are the rest of them off?"

"They're that, and away up the road to talk about something," said Condy Heelagh. "And with the times that's in it one never knows what they're up to."

"True for you, Condy," said Coy. "In the old days, the time of the Molly Maguires, one never knew what they were up to."

"I know what they're about now," said Peggy Ribbig, breaking a decade of the Rosary short and getting to her feet. "It's the soldiers that they'll be after, them at the back iv the hills that's watchin' the railway bridge of Clyarra afeard that the Sein Feiners will blow it up with dynamite. And that'll be the stoppin' iv the Old Age Pension, I'll warrant ye."

"Maybe they'll be wantin' to buy that gun from me," said Condy Heelagh, his eye on the ancient fowling-piece.

Meanwhile those who had left Condy's came to a halt on the roadside and looked at one another.

"All know what's to be done," said Cathal Cassidy in a low voice.

"As per instructions," said Corney McKelvie.

"The morrow night in Micky Bawn Reedagh's of Drimacroom," said Cathal. "Meet at midnight, fully armed."

"Full fightin' order," said Corney McKelvie.

II

When Micky Bawn Reedagh died, old Micky Bawn Reedagh of the townland of Drimacroom, he went to his last home on the day that Hudagh Nelly Wor, borne, shoulder high, was carried to the little graveyard of Stranarachary. Micky Bawn was rich in stock and land, a man of substance, held in high respect by his neighbors. But he lived all alone, did the work of the farm and household on his own, washed his own socks, milked his own cows, did a woman's work as well as a man's, and for all that he lived to the ripe age of eighty-seven.

Dying, he left a farm of fifty-three acres behind him as well as one hundred and twenty-seven pounds in gold. At his funeral the offerings amounted to seventeen pounds, ten shillings, a sure sign of the great regard in which he was held. The farm passed to his cousin, a young man named Andy Croagh, who looked on money as something

round to go round, spent it on drink, sold the farm and in the same manner spent the price it brought.

Hughie McGroary, merchant of Stranarachary, then became the owner of the land and used it as a grazing-farm. The house was turned into a byre, and here, seventeen years after Micky Bawn Reedagh's death, Micky walked the same as when he was alive, carrying on the various jobs of the farm. No person would visit the place in the dark. All kept away from it, shunning it as a place accursed and haunted.

On the night following the meeting in Condy Heelagh's a number of men, carrying strange weapons that glinted in the light of a growing moon, entered the byre, and presently the cows came out into the meadows.

The men, with the exception of one, sat down on the floor indifferent to the filth of the place. The one who stood upright, a tall, dark man with a mask over his face, spoke.

"Eleven!" he said in a whisper. "Who's missing?"

"Corney McKelvie," was the answer.

"No idea iv where he is, any iv ye?" asked the tall man, who was Cathal Cassidy.

"I met him goin' down to Stranarachary," said a voice from the darkness. "He's drawin' his pension."

"How much is it?" asked Columb Ruagh, who was sitting under the window, rubbing the nape of his neck with a toil-thickened forefinger.

"Thirteen and nine a week," said Fergus Donnel.

"Well, whatever this gas is, it's worth gulpin' down if it's goin' to bring a man in a salary like that," said Columb Ruagh.

"Well, there he's comin' now," said a voice from a dark corner of the byre as a step could be heard from the darkness.

"Halt! Who goes there!" called a man from the door, Liam Logan, who was standing there with a rifle as sentry.

"A friend," was the answer.

"Pass, friend. All is well!"

McKelvie came through the door, his form clearly out-

lined against the night. He brought a gun from his shoulder and thumped its butt on the floor.

"Where did you get that?" asked Cathal Cassidy, alluding to the weapon which McKelvie brought in.

"From Condy Heelagh, sir," McKelvie replied. "Asked Condy to give it me this mornin', but the demned old washout wouldn't. I told him I'd bring it back, but no bong! Then he said he'd give us the lend iv it if I gave him half a quid. Hadn't half a quid so I'd to go into Stranarachary and draw my blinkin' pension."

"Can it shoot?" asked Columb Ruagh.

"The damned thing looks as if it might," said McKelvie. "Now, what's doin'?" he asked, turning to Cathal Cassidy.

"The first thing to do is to get there," said a man sitting on his hunkers in the center of the room, the light of the moon streaming through the narrow window resting on his shoulders. "It's a good four miles over the hill. By the road six miles or more. And maybe it's the polis we'd meet."

"Wish we did," growled Columb Ruagh.

"We'll have to get there before dawn," said Cathal Cassidy. When he spoke all became silent. "Who has the time?"

A naked forearm stretched itself out on the floor; a luminous watch attached to the wrist glimmered in the darkness.

"Half-past twelve," said the man with the watch.

"What are we goin' to do with them?" asked Fergus Donnel, in a nervous voice. His age was seventeen.

"Well, I'll tell ye what we'll do," said McKelvie in short, sharp sentences, clipping his words, probably in imitation of a Captain whom he knew in France and whom he admired greatly. "We'll do the surprise stunt, get on their bally necks. Whizz! Just like that."

"How?" asked Cathal with a smile.

"Damned simple, old man, damned simple," said McKelvie. "They come back from duty, morning, 6:30 Brigade time. Got this Mills grenade timed to it"—he pulled a gun-metal watch from his waistcoat pocket, looked at its

face and put it back in his pocket again—"timed to the minute. Got it from a mate o' mine, Nobby Such, a good boy keen as mustard, but no demned imagination. Hadn't enough imagination to be funky, but a good beggar all the same. Got knocked over on the Somme. A Boche done him in. I done the Boche in."

"With the bay'net?" asked Fergus Donnel, drawing his breath sharply as if he felt the steel in his own body.

"Yes, God rest him!" said McKelvie.

"Wish I'd a bay'net to shove through some iv the damned polis down in Stranarachary," said Columb Ruagh with a sigh. "Sergeant Keeran for choice."

"Well, we're not goin' to do these fellows any harm the night!" said Cathal, alluding to the job in hand. "We'll just disarm them, tie them up and leave them lying by the road till some one finds them."

"That's the ticket," said McKelvie. "We'll need a map to get the lie of the land and see the jumpin' off position."

"Ye know the place as well as ourselves," said Columb Ruagh. "We'll lie be the back iv Carrig-drim, where Biddy Logan herds her cow and scratches herself all day. Need a map to get there!" Columb's upper lip curled to the nose.

"Well, it's nearly time," said Cathal Cassidy, hitting his pipe against the leaf of his hand. Outside the moon was setting in the back hills, and sheaves of shadows crept in from the fields taking up position behind clumps of furze and whin as if they also were assembling for some ghostly escapade. "Fall in!" said Cathal in a whisper.

The darker corner of the byre gave substance to their shadows, and figures took shape in the gloom. Two lines of men fell into place, the muffled thud of weapons touching the floor could be heard. The cabin, though a small one, seemed to have taken on ominous depth. The outlines of the men's heads showing against the window were distorted in the dim, milky light, vague, indistinct, incorporeal. Now and again a gleam came from the darkness from the weapons of the men. All were silent, waiting

for their leader to speak. He spoke in Irish, in a calm, quiet, serious voice as if the business in hand, because it was meet and right, required no justification and no apology.

At 6:30 in the morning the sentries, now on guard at the Bridge of Clyarra, would be relieved, five men and a sergeant of the Army of Occupation. These would go back to barracks by the public road, over the uplands of Drimacroom. On their route they would pass Carrig-drim; here they would be in a very lonely part of the parish, and here the Sein Feiners would wait for them, lying hidden amidst the ferns that grew by the roadside. When the soldiers of the Army of Occupation passed, the Sein Feiners would cover them with their rifles. On this being done Cathal Cassidy would step out on the roadway and call on the soldiers to surrender.

If the men in khaki showed fight, those in the ferns were to fire, but fire high so that the enemy would understand that the affair was not a joke. Only as a last extremity were bullets to be used for the purpose of killing. Rifles and ammunition were to be taken, and the soldiers were to be tied and left by the roadside so that they would be unable to disclose the fact of the raid before the raiders could get away.

"Just a short prayer for our success," said Cathal when orders were concluded. "One Pater and Ave."

The dark figures knelt in the obscurity, gripping their weapons. Cathal gave out the prayer in a low, serious voice deep with feeling, and, with the exception of one, the whole, whose minds on the eve of a great incident were as susceptible to impressions as a raw wound, responded in solemn voices. The exception was Columb Ruagh. The red-haired man, unmoved by any refining influence, knelt because the others knelt, his head against the weapon which he held, his face as expressionless and vacant as the wood it touched.

At five o'clock in the morning the party arrived at Carrig-drim and sorted themselves out in the ferns. All wore masks and all were armed, two with Army rifles, Lee En-

fields, Columb Ruagh with an Army revolver and a scythe, straightened and set in a rough ash haft; McKelvie, in addition to his fowling-piece, carried a revolver tied to his waist, and Cathal Cassidy had a rifle with bayonet affixed. This was the only bayonet in the party.

It was now dawn, the sky overcast with feathery clouds and a wind rising. Carrig-drim, a lichen-clad rock battered by the storms of ages, stood by the roadway, under its shade a well and a holly bush. Round the rock was a field of ferns, in which the men lay down and waited for the dawn to break. Over the country was a white mist beginning to rise and fade in the air. There was a strange thrill in the dawn, something tense and striking.

The sky seemed to clear, and simultaneously all things woke to life. A lark shot into the air caroling; a sheep, its fleece wet with the dew, gazed inquisitively over a clump of ferns at the men. It seemed as if it wanted to ask something. The dawn brightened, and behind the dark hills of the east the sky reddened to the rising sun.

"No firing if they don't make a fight iv it," said Cathal. "And if ye have to fire at all fire low at their legs."

"But they're our enemies," said Columb Ruagh ominously, his eyes, which resembled tongues of fire, gleaming with a ferocity which Cathal had seldom noticed in them before.

"These are the orders," said Cathal Cassidy. "Ye don't fire unless it's the last resort, and when ye fire ye're to fire high."

"But if the bullet goes low by mistake," Columb persisted.

"If that happens," said Cathal in a low, decisive voice, speaking to the company in general but addressing his remark indirectly to Columb Ruagh, "and if instructions are not carried out to the letter, the man that disobeys will never leave Carrig-drim alive."

"That's the ticket, old man," said McKelvie. "Damned good sports most of these blokes. I've shared rations with them and I know."

They relapsed into silence. Donnel, the youngster of

seventeen, had been detailed off to watch the road leading to Clyarra Bridge. When he sighted the soldiers coming he was to crawl back through the ferns and report. From time to time McKelvie drew out his gun-metal watch, looked at it, put it back in his pocket again. His hand shook a little as he did so.

Presently a rustling was heard in the ferns and Donnel appeared.

"They're comin'," he said in a shaky voice and placing his weapons on the ground in front of him. These were two, a bill hook and a thick ash plant.

"How many?" asked Cathal Cassidy in a whisper.

"Seven."

"We're twelve," said Cathal, getting to his knees. His voice was sharp and decisive. "Now, ye know what's to be done. When they pass, I get into the road and call on them to put their hands up. As I do so all of you stand upright, cover them with your rifles, hold your pikes and other weapons at the point and wait for orders. Ready!"

As they lay down again they could hear from the distance the steady tramp of ammunition boots on the roadway. Going easy, smoking and carrying on a loud conversation, they swung into sight, their steel helmets atilt and their unsheathed bayonets sparkling in the sun. They marched in double file, their sergeant walking alongside taking part in the conversation. Far from barracks, discipline was relaxed and they were marching easy.

"Halt!"

The command was given in such stentorian tones that the men involuntarily stopped. The sergeant gave a startled gasp; the first thought occurring to the man was probably his own crime in allowing the party returning from guard to march in such an unmilitary fashion. Turning round, he found himself gazing into the rifle of Cathal Cassidy.

"What the hell!" he stammered.

"Hands up at once," said Cathal from the folds of his mask, his eyes running along the sights of his rifle and

coming to a stop on the sergeant's breast. "Every man! Hands up at once!"

The sergeant became suddenly aware that Cathal was not alone. The clattering of weapons from the ferns attracted his attention. He gazed in that direction and saw the growth bristling with weapons. Half-a-dozen weapons were pointed at his face.

"Well, we're right in the soup!" he said, shooting both arms over his head. "Up with your hands, boys. It's the only thing to do!"

Seven pair of hands went up in the air while from their ferny fastness the masked figures looked on.

"Three of you men, out and take their arms away from them," Cathal Cassidy ordered; and three men, the thickset Columb Ruagh, the lithe McKelvie and the young stripling, Donnel, came out on the roadway and took the rifles from the men in khaki. They placed these on the road then stood to attention and gazed at Cathal Cassidy.

"That's right," said Cathal. "Three more men come out and take these weapons away."

With these words he came forward and faced the soldiers.

"I'm sorry that we've to put you to all this inconvenience, sergeant," he said. "But it's the fortune of war. We have the upper hand to-day, to-morrow it may be yours. You have the advantage, for though you have invaded a country, its people treat you courteously when you're in their power. To-day we put a rope round your arms and legs but to-morrow if you grip one of us we get the same kind iv a rope tied round our necks."

He turned round, looked at the masked figures in the ferns.

"Tie up these men," he said in a brisk tone of command, pointing at the soldiers. A bundle of ropes was carried into the center of the road, and with these the Sein Feiners proceeded to bind the soldiers of the Garrison.

McKelvie took a youngster in hand, a pale, flaxen-haired boy, the down on a virginal chin free as yet from the razor,

wearing three chevrons of service on one arm and two wound stripes on the other. McKelvie bound the two arms together.

"If I'm squeezing too tight let me know, matey," said McKelvie from behind his mask, an empty flour-poke with two square holes cut in it for the eyes. "If ye've copped a packet in yer arms or legs let me know."

"Got it in the back," said the youngster.

"Sniper?" inquired the voice behind the flour-poke.

"Shrapnel," said the boy.

"Couldn't work yer ticket on it?" asked the flour-poke.

"They've stopped makin' tickets now," said the soldier with a good-humored smile, looking at his thongs.

"No bong," said McKelvie.

"No bloody bong," said the youngster.

"Well, this is finee," said McKelvie, having finished roping the hands. "Now sit down on this hobeen and let me do up yer legs."

The youngster sat down on a hob by the roadside and gave McKelvie his legs, requesting the Sein Feiner to tie the rope high up near the knee as the lower parts of the legs had stopped a number of machine-gun bullets.

"What part iv the line?" asked the flour-poke.

"High Wood."

"Somme?"

"The Somme."

"Tough place, that," said McKelvie with the air of one who knows.

"Were you there?" asked the soldier.

"Knew a fellow that was. That's all," said McKelvie, suddenly realizing that he had spoken unwisely.

"Fall in, you men," said Cassidy when the job was complete.

Forming up on the roadside, the Sein Feiners stood at ease.

"Party!" Cathal ordered and the heels of the heavy hobnailed boots (one pair military which had ground the cobbles of Picardy and Pas de Calais) clicked together.

"Right dress! Cover off, rear rank!"

The masked figures sprang to it, assorting themselves with the precision of men used to the tenets of drill; in gait and attitude soldiers, in dress country yokels who had just come away from the grind of husbandry.

"Number!"

"*Ahn! Deoc! Trur! Carra! Cuigead! Seachta!*"

"Move to the right in fours! Form fours!"

The men formed into fours, indifferent as wooden soldiers to the men who lay, tethered and spancelled, under Carrig-drim.

"By the left! Quick March!" the leader ordered, and the men marched off, shoulders squared, heads erect and eyes to front. The soldiers of the Garrison writhed round on their sides and watched the Sein Feiners depart. From the distance came the order to slope arms and with a simultaneous movement, the precision of a machine, the weapons swung from the trail to the shoulder.

"Some soldiers," said a soldier, admiration in his voice.

"Posh wallahs!" said the youth whom McKelvie had girt.

"Well, we couldn't do anything but what we done," said the sergeant, who in anticipation was already in front of a court martial giving an explanation of the incident.

III

Revolution, no matter what its end, aim or purpose, has its deformities as well as its beauties, in the same way as the choicest fruit has its worm and the snuggest roof its downdrop. Just as war has its pillagers, profiteers and sutlers, religion its quacks, shufflers and impostors, so revolution has its tricksters, charlatans and knaves. To this latter category of men belonged Columb Ruagh Keeran.

With Columb greed was the predominant passion. To this everything was subservient. He was the Grand Miser, loving his money as a sensualist his mistress, a collector of antiques his curios, a writer his books and a painter his pictures, for after all most men are misers at bottom.

Everything done by Columb was towards a certain end, and with one object in view he suited his moods to different occasions and appeared in different form to all with whom he had dealings. To Mr. Brogan Columb was a blackmailer, to Cathal Cassidy not a bad stick but funny in his ways, to Cassie Shemus Meehal an old vagabond, to the tinkers who on one memorable occasion occupied the house at Crinnan cross-roads Columb was a mad roaring bull of a man, to Coy Fergus Beeragh a deep-dyed rascal who embraced you like a brother while his hand was in your pocket. But as Coy was old and doating no one paid much heed to his talk.

However, despite the varied opinions held concerning his character, Columb was now a man of money. His wealth grew and grew; copper coin became silver and the silver gold. And the more it increased the greater grew the grip of greed. Money was everything to the man, his labor and recreation, his food physical and spiritual.

With Sein Fein in the ascendancy, Columb felt that it was wise to belong to the party. But to belong to this he had to pay an entrance fee of one shilling, and a shilling was a big sum. If he gave it the Sein Feiners would probably increase their custom. At present there was another illicit distiller in Drimeeney, a Sein Feiner. This man was not as good in the art as Columb. Still he was a Sein Feiner, and those of his ilk went preferably to this man.

Columb took a shilling from his store, looked at it, felt it between forefinger and thumb, put it in his mouth, ran it between his teeth, took it out again, spittle wet, put it on the leaf of his hand and surveyed it with a sigh. It was a shilling, a disk with form, color, and outline. It would certainly bring in others if given to the Sein Fein party. But even then that shilling would probably never come back again. It would go, and it would be lost forever. Still, there was the Drimeeney man making money from the sale of potheen, and if a shilling could turn trade in Columb's direction it was worth while speculating it. Columb paid.

He was also a waterkeeper. But that was a blind. A

waterkeeper was never suspect in the eyes of the Government. Columb drew pay for this job, but never interfered with the young men who burned the river in the spawning season.

Following the incident of the raid, Crinnan, at the back of Godspeed, a fastness beyond police reach, became the depository of the rifles taken from the soldiers of the Army of Occupation, and Columb was appointed warden of the arms.

IV

The home of Coy Fergus Beeragh was some distance back from the country road, so when the August fair of Stranarachary came round he straddled down the brae in the fall of dusk and came to the house of Condy Heelagh. Here in the wayside cabin people would drop in for a while on their way home from market, and here Coy, whose legs were now too weak for a long journey, could sit down and listen to the talk of the day. The older people were coming back from the fair now, the young would not be back for some time yet. The night was very wet, and a heavy rain was splattering on the roadway.

Condy Heelagh and Peggy Ribbig were sitting by the fire, the woman knitting a sock, the old bent-back husband looking at the flames. He had now given up cobbling. His eyes were getting weak and his age-gnarled hand had lost its cunning. On the hob was a kettle singing wearily, and a pot of stirabout simmered on the crook.

"Coy it is!" said Condy, looking up when the old man entered the door. "Ye must be hearty on it to sprawhle down the knowes a night like this and it rainin' heavens hard."

"Ah! it's a tough journey I've put over me coming down," said Coy, wagging his coat like a pair of flight-weary wings and splashing the rain to the floor. "It's old bones that take hard to the knowes, Condy Heelagh."

"True," said Condy, doddering to his feet and holding his hand to Coy. "We're gettin' on in years, the two iv

us, but all the same we've seen more than one bottle to the bottom in our day."

"Aye, aye," said Coy, setting himself down in the chair which Peggy Ribbig had ceremoniously placed at his back. "We were once young on it, the two iv us, and now we're old on it and, and—"

A melancholy feeling welled up in his heart. He could not finish his sentence, and a tear trickled down his face.

"Aye, we're all iv us old on it," said Peggy Ribbig sadly, feeling that Coy would find some consolation in being informed that his plight was common to others. A tear also came from her eyes.

"It's always the same, always," said Condy, with a philosophic nod of his head as he sat down again. "People will be for a wee while, and then they go like leaves iv a tree. But anyway, sit down, Coy"—Coy was already sitting—"and have a skinful iv stirabout and a ghabouge iv milk and the boys will be in from the fair in no time from now."

"Well, since ye ask me, Condy, I'll have a drop iv the stirabout," Coy replied, a gleam of thanks lighting his filmy eyes. "For mind ye, I'm not one for stirabout now at all, but seein' that Peggy herself has made it I'll have a sup. She's second to none with the pot-stick."

"Well, indeed, Coy!" said Peggy, accepting the compliment, but by her tone implying that if she excelled in the housewifely art of making stirabout it was only as it should be. "Some women make it one way," she went on, "and some another. But it's like anything else, for there's only one way iv doin' it right, and if it's made any other way it's wrong."

"True," said Coy, "and very true. But they've got out iv the way iv makin' it now. In the old times—"

"There were never times like them," said Condy Heelagh, taking a pipe from the bowl in the chimney brace and emptying the heel tap on the floor.

"Never times like them," said Coy sadly.

"And what would ye like best?" asked Peggy as she

lifted the pot from the crook. "Butter-milk, or thick milk, or skim milk, or sweet milk?"

She spoke with pride. So many varied milks spoke of a full house.

"Whatever ye like," said Coy gallantly. "Whatever ye put down afore a man is always the best."

"But there was no times like the old times," said Condy Heelagh, who still was pondering over a subject which Coy had now probably forgotten. "Not the times that we saw, maybe, but the times that them that was afore us saw."

"Ah, them were the times," said Coy. "Them that had my own name and are no more were in their days men of consideration and great power, with lands without stint and houses iv free hospitality. Muiris Dunleavy and Cormac Dunleavy and Dony Dunleavy, all great doctors, and what they couldn't cure nobody else in Ireland could cure."

Here it may be explained that Beeragh was not Coy's family name. His father, Hugh Dunleavy, married a widow named Mary Fergus Beeragh, so called after her man that was. Three weeks after the second marriage her fresh husband died, and that before Dungarrow could accustom itself to call the woman Dunleavy. When the second husband was buried the woman was still known as Mary Fergus Beeragh, and Coy, who came after, was from his youth upwards known to the people by the name which he bore now.

"They were doctors in the old times," Coy continued, in his hoarse, wheezy voice. "I mind one day thirteen years back come next Hall'eve and me comin' along be the road from Stranarachary, I met Doctor McHugh, the doctor that then was, God rest him!"

" 'Good day to ye, Coy Fergus Beeragh,' says he, in his free and easy way with his clay pipe in his gob just like one iv ourselves. 'One iv the Dunleavy's ye are,' says he; 'and an old family that was not without merit in the days that were long, long ago.'

" 'And is to this day,' says I. 'For in land and stock

we can show a holdin' as big and bigger than many's a one in the parish.'

" 'But I don't mane in that way,' says the doctor. 'What I mane is this. The men iv yer name were once equal to the great O'Donnels themselves.'

" 'And are to this day,' I cut in with. 'I never knew an O'Donnel yet that could spit across my arm at fair or market.'

"As I said this he looks at me. 'Why don't ye wait till I finish what I'm goin' to say?' says he. 'The Dunleavys were great doctors iv medicine in the old days. And even now there's more than one book to be seen in the world that was writ by them about physic and cures for decline, ringworm and what not.'

" ' 'Twas the first I ever heard iv it, doctor,' says I. 'But that and all I'm not surprised, for is not a woman that's sib iv me own, Sally Rourke iv Meenaroodagh that knows all the cures iv the world for warts and sprains and beelings, the greatest doctor that we've got in the parish, and her mother, cousin iv me own but far out, a Dunleavy?' "

"Well, that's true," said Peggy, handing Coy a bowl of stirabout drowned in milk. "Just put this inside iv ye now and it will warm ye up."

"Thank ye, Peggy, thank ye," said the old man, catching the bowl of porridge, placing it on the floor and getting to his feet. He gripped the woman's hand. "Thank ye, Peggy, thank ye," he said, the easy tears of age welling in his eyes. "Thank ye kindly, and may ye have many a long and hearty day in front iv ye yet, with the Pension comin' every Friday, and the purse in the petticoat getting bigger on it every week iv the year."

"They'll soon be no pensions at all if they keep on as they're keepin' in Dungarrow now," said Peggy with a mournful shake of her head. "It's drillin' and marchin' and tyin' up the poor soldiers behind the hills, and them comin' home from a night's heavy work at the railway."

"And serve them damned well right," said a voice from the doorway.

Peggy, Coy and Condy fixed a startled glance on the door to see Corney McKelvie standing there, the rain seeping from his clothes to the floor. The youngster wore no cap, his waistcoat was open in front, its buttons gone as if it had been pulled apart with violent hands. In his fist he carried an ash plant.

"Serve them damned well right," he repeated. "The Army iv Occupation! What right have they to be here? That's what I'd like to know! What right have they to be here?"

"Was there a fight?" asked Condy from his corner.

"A damned political do," said Corney, sitting down on a near chair and getting to his feet almost as soon as he sat down. "We drew it across them!"

"God help us all!" exclaimed Peggy. "What was it?"

At that instant Anne, the unmarried daughter, came in, her shawl drawn tightly round her head and the hair that hung loosely over her brow beaded with raindrops.

"They're killin' one another all over the parish," said the girl angrily. "It's out with sticks they are, all the way from here down to Stranarachary and goin' for one another like wild bulls. Yerself, ye fool, was in it, too, I'll bet," said Anne, fixing her eyes on Corney.

"The order was 'Over the top and the best of luck'!" mumbled Corney. "And over we went—"

"Ye're drunk, ye omadhaun," said Anne with a scornful curl of her lips.

"Drunk," said the boy. "*Vin rouge no bong.* But orders are out on the polis barracks!"

"What orders?" asked Condy.

"They're lookin' for informers," said Corney in a thick voice. "Three pounds for an informer, for a Carey."

"Once upon a time in the days that used to be," said Coy Fergus Beeragh, who was again sitting down, "there was more than one that would turn traitor—"

"What kind iv informers?" asked Condy Heelagh, cutting across the preliminaries of Coy's narrative.

"It's about the guns that were took off iv the soldiers at Drimacroom," said Anne as she took off her shawl and

hung it on the beam that stretched across the kitchen. "The polis have a notice out sayin' that they'll give three pounds for every gun stole from the red coats. No questions will be asked, and all that's to be done by a man is to hand them in."

"They're on the look-out for traitors," said Corney. "But they look in the wrong shop when they come to Dungarrow."

"They'll stop the Pensions, anyway," said Peggy with a sigh, anticipating the worst.

At that moment several newcomers entered. They were mostly young men, all more or less disheveled and all dripping with wet. Cathal Cassidy was there, Liam Logan, and Fergus Donnel. All looked excited, their eyes lit with an uncommon brightness and all armed with sticks. The last to enter was Mr. Brogan. On seeing him Peggy Ribbig gave a loud shriek and sank on the kitchen bed. And no wonder! A streak of blood showed on the face of the scholar, running from temple to lip, and dripping on the lapel of his coat.

Mr. Brogan, with drooping head, staggered to a chair, sat down and stared wearily at the floor. After a moment he raised his eyes and fixed a puzzled look on the assembled company with an absent air as if he did not recognize anybody.

"I would like to know what's comin' over the people iv the place at all," said Peggy, getting to her feet and looking helplessly at the crowd steaming with rain. "What's comin' over everybody? And yerself above all, Eamon na Sgaddan. An old Shanachie and out fightin'. And there's blood on yer face, too! Put a cobweb on it and it'll stop it. Every one's mad. Sit down, the whole lot iv ye, and have a drop iv tay! Put the kettle on the crook, Anne. Ye should have put it there half an hour ago. You're white, Eamon na Sgaddan! Who struck ye?"

"I was impeded in the vicinity of Mull a Rudagh," began Eamon. "My curiosity was aroused—"

"Ye got a crack on the nose because ye stuck it into a business that had nothing to do with ye," said Corney Mc-

Kelvie angrily. "It's into yer house, to old Cassie, that ye should have gone hours ago. Comin' out with us youngsters! Ye should have more sense in yer head than be out at this hour. What do ye think iv him, Peggy?"

The old woman was now perched on a rickety chair groping with the stock of the old gun, which was again behind the rafters, pulling off cobwebs.

"Poor old Eamon's all right on it if he gets this cobweb on his cheek," said the woman. "It'll stop the bleedin'. But it's newins for him to be out caperin' about like a youngster. Now"—she went on, coming down from her perch, the sooty cobweb between her finger and thumb, and approaching Eamon na Sgaddan—"now hold yer head on one side and let me see where the rascals have hit ye."

"A slight concussion iv the head," said Eamon, bending towards Peggy. As he did so the blood dropped in a stream to the floor. "It's of no consequence. I should have remained indoors."

"Well, nothin' will ever put the big words out iv yer head, Mr. Eamon," said Peggy, relieved to find that a blow on the head had not interfered with Eamon's scholarly attainments. "Musha! I don't know what ye're talkin' about! It's not a big cut at all. Just sit down and it will be all right. There, the cobweb's on! Poor dear, they shouldn't have hit ye and ye so simple!" She spoke as if to a child with a cut finger. "Sit down, sit down, and there'll soon be a drop iv tay that ye can put down into yer belly and that will warm ye."

Eamon sat down with a groan and looked at the woman. His face was very white, and a queer, pained expression had settled in his eyes. The cobweb roll, black and encrusted with soot, looked like a scab. The blood, still flowing down the man's cheek, gleamed like a dark blue livid streak as the light caught it.

"Thank ye very much, Mrs. Heelagh," he said in a low voice, staring at the woman as if trying to recall something. "Thank ye very much for what ye've done to help me. I don't deserve such kindness. . . . Now I'll get home. Herself will be waitin' for me and I'm late. Thank ye

again, Mrs. Heelagh, and thank ye all at the same time. Good night t'ye and thank ye all."

He got to his feet and made his way unsteadily towards the door.

"Wait for the tay, Eamon," said Peggy Ribbig. "It's on the fire and it'll soon be on the boil. Is it on the boil yet, Anne? Ye should have it on all night. Ye're always slow."

"Don't trouble about me, Mrs. Heelagh," said Eamon, leaning against the wall as if unable to proceed any further. "I'll get up the brae and get to bed. Good night," he mumbled. "Good night to all iv ye."

"It's not out iv this house that ye're goin' the night till ye have at laste one drop iv tay," said Peggy. "What are ye lookin' at, Anne! Put some more turf on the fire. And yerself come up be the fire and sit down again," the woman went on, gripping Eamon by the shoulder and gently pulling him back. "D'ye think that we're goin' to let ye out iv the house that way! Come, sit down and make yerself at home!"

"Come, Eamon, and sit down and have the drop iv tay," said Cathal Cassidy, catching Eamon's arm. "Ye don't look at all well, but if ye have a drop iv tay it'll warm ye, man; and ye'll be all right."

"Just as much as will wet the lips even," said Corney McKelvie feelingly. The young man seemed suddenly to realize that Mr. Brogan was in a serious state.

"There's nothin' like tay," said Fergus Donnel. "And on a night like the night, anyway!"

"Anne, Anne, hurry up and pull out the greeshaugh from the hob," Peggy wailed, placing Mr. Brogan on the chair and looking at her daughter. "Pull the greeshaugh out with the tongs and put the taypot on it."

Mr. Brogan looked round the kitchen again, touched the cobweb tenderly with his forefinger and shivered.

"Who hit him?" asked Condy Heelagh and fixed his eyes on Cathal Cassidy.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Cathal. "The last I saw of him was comin' from Stranarachary. He was walk-

in' along by himself, and the Drimeeney boys were wantin' to fight everybody, and there was no time to spare for anybody. They will want to fight!"

"They were to clear the town iv Sein Feiners, by their way iv talkin'," said Corney McKelvie. "But did they?"

As he spoke he got to his feet, waved his stick in the air and sat down again.

"But did they?" he repeated.

"Why will the people keep fightin' one with the other?" asked Cathal Cassidy sadly. "No good will ever come iv it if they go on like this. . . . Do ye know who hit ye at all?" he asked, looking at Mr. Brogan.

"I don't know at all," said Eamon with a shake of his head. "I was proceedin' past Mull a Rudagh and something came out from the side of the road, from the bushes, and I was hit, I suppose. Anyway the next thing I mind was to find meself lyin' in the ditch with a pain in my head and the blood runnin' down."

"The vagabone, whoever it was!" said Condy Heelagh.

"God knows what the place is comin' to," said Peggy Ribbig, lifting the teapot from the hob.

" 'Twas a wild night with the fightin', anyway," said Fergus Donnel. "The man that was after the Drimeeney ones, and after them well was Columb Ruagh."

Mr. Brogan gave a slight start and a tremor shook his frame.

"It's the shivers that ye have," said Peggy Ribbig, handing Eamon a bowl of tea. "Put this down ye and it'll warm the inside iv ye."

He took the bowl, drank the tea and then got to his feet.

"Good night to all iv ye," he said. *"Slan leath,* Mrs. Heelagh, and thank ye."

"I'll see ye up the brae," said Cathal Cassidy, also getting to his feet and going to the door. The two men went out together into the rain.

GREEN RUSHES

It's now for me a petticoat red
And a whip of green rushes,
So out on the road with my eyes ahead
For the lane of the wild thrushes.
Who was it saw my good red dress?
And who was it saw me dressing?
'Twas himself, indeed, and none the less,
And that was a great blessing!

There's many the rush in a whip that's long,
In a whip of green rushes!
There's many a song and them all in song,
In the lane of the wild thrushes.
What wouldn't they give for a petticoat red?
And wouldn't they call me funny
That's more for the dreams that's filling my head
Than a crock of good red money?

CHAPTER VII

Eileen Conroy

I

THE fair, the raid and other events which came to disturb the calm of the parish gradually became things of the past. Dungarrow had told of itself again, and the ordinary tenor of life pursued its sober way.

The weather cleared, became warm and dry, and the mown hay was browning in the holms and rising in handshakings and trampcocks. The trout died at the bottom of thirsty wells, the big brook which ran down the braes of Meenaroodagh had no longer a head of water to foot the steepest fall; the River Owenaruddagh was a trickle, running lazily as castor-oil under its hazel-lined broughs. It was a drouth of uncommon severity, but meet for the season and beneficent for the corn and hay.

Even the paste of the notice gummed on the barracks' wall, offering a reward for returned rifles, dried. The notice fell off but was not put up again. Why this notice was not replaced gave rise to a little conjecture. One said that the police were short of paste, another that Dungarrow could not be bought, so it was hardly worth while putting such notices up, and a third suggested that there was a traitor, which remark was laughed to scorn. But presently discussion of this affair lapsed. The people were too busy and had no time for idle conjecture. Good weather must not be put to loss in the harvest time.

Cassie Shemus Meehal was at work in the fields with her scythe, mowing sward on sward in the holm which bounded the river. Even now, despite her years, she was as good

as a man on the sned and could set her blade to a finer edge than many a trousered mower.

Mr. Brogan did not mow; in fact since the night of the Stranarachary fair he did very little. About ten in the morning he appeared, walked to the fields with unsteady gait, busied himself for a while shaking the newly mown hay. Then he would sit down on a sward, rest there for a long time, while the swish of Cassie's scythe cut through the stillness of the field. The woman took no notice of her man; did not even reproach him for his idleness. The spancells that chafed his limbs for the first seventeen years of his life were things of the past now. Mr. Brogan, since the night on which he tempered a razor by Cassie's bedside, was a free man, and master in his own house.

But things of even greater gravity than the ties of marriage were now troubling the poor man. He was wasting, losing weight and vitality. The sickness had laid its hold on him. Since the night of the Stranarachary fair he had not been the same man. It was not the blow on the temple that mattered so much. A queer sensation, something like a little feather tickling, was now making itself felt over the right kidney. This tickle ceased when he moved about in the open, but when he lay down at night it increased. He scratched the skin without easing the irritation.

After a while he dropped off to sleep, but the slumber was a troubled one, filled with nightmares. In the morning there was a peculiar taste in the man's mouth, a weakness in his spine which kept him to his bed for a good three hours after his woman had got up to her work.

When he examined the skin which hid the itch in the morning, he found that it was scarred and scored a little, which showed that his fingers had done something towards easing the irritation while he slept.

Never before the fair of Stranarachary had the man suffered from any ailment like this, and as to its cause he had not the slightest theory to give. What gave him pain after the assault was the blow on the temple; this now had practically become well, but the other injury, the one which caused him to itch under the skin, did not make itself felt

at the beginning, though now it was gradually growing worse. Probably he had fallen on a stone, possibly he had been kicked in the kidney. Anyway, whatever happened, Mr. Brogan's right kidney was now out of order. The itch went at last, only to be replaced with a dull pain which gave the man the impression that some foreign substance had been stuffed into the corner of his belly.

But who was the man who had attacked him? Mr. Brogan did not know; a blow came out of the night, felling him, and he lost consciousness, unaware who dealt the blow.

Here events which occurred on the day preceding as well as the day on which the fair was held in Stranarachary may be given.

II

It was on the evening preceding the day of the fair that the Stranarachary police pinned the notice on the barracks' wall offering a price for the rifles taken from the Army of Occupation. Columb Ruagh, who happened to be in the village buying meal seed for his vat, was passing the barracks when the sergeant and two men were pasting the paper to the wall.

"What's it that ye're puttin' up there?" asked Columb.

The sergeant read out the notice to the man, and nobody being about at the time Columb caught the sergeant by the sleeve and told him to come inside as he had something to say to him. The interview was a long one, and when Columb went home at midnight across the hills he was accompanied by a man in plain clothes, and this man happened to be a constable from Stranarachary.

Columb Ruagh and the constable went back to the police station in the morning, crossing the hills, and Eamon na Sgaddan saw them. He had got up early and went to look for sheep, stock for the fair, that had broken their tethers and went back to the hills. The dawn was rising dully, its cold glare as yet unlit by the luster of the sun. Blocks of night mist lay on the surface of the bogs. Mr. Brogan

was standing on the lap of the Meenaroodagh bog, his eyes taking in the near distance on the look for his sheep, when a sound startled him, the sough of a foot sinking into the marsh.

Presently out from a block of mist came two men, Columb Ruagh and a constable in plain clothes, both carrying rifles.

Eamon looked another way as if he did not see the men and allowed them to pass in silence. That night when returning from the fair, Eamon met with his accident. Possibly the scholar knew too much.

III

It was a Sunday morning, three weeks following the fair of Stranarachary, and when Mr. Brogan woke from his sleep and saw the sun shining through the window he had no desire to rise from his bed. He now slept by himself in the room adjoining the kitchen. Cassie Shemus Meehal slept in the other room.

The woman was about and busy straining the milk and preparing breakfast before going out to church. The hay on the farm was all lifted, and the corn was in stooks. The weather was admirable.

Mr. Brogan turned on his side, and with the sound of the activities of the next room in his ears he looked round his own apartment. At one angle of the room lay a pile of turf piled up against the wall, near it was a chair, with bottom splintered and back broken. He looked at the bed with the varied assortment of rags which made a covering for him and then took out a pair of long, bony arms from beneath the blankets and looked at them. Their thinness was appalling. Another month's sickness and the skin would be withered away, he thought, leaving nothing but the bones.

As he looked at the arms, Mr. Brogan suddenly realized that he was going to die. There was something novel in the thought. It opened up a wide field which he could cross to something definite. Up till now he was ailing, a man who merely had the sickness on him, who might get

better and might get worse. In this range of possibilities there was nothing certain and assured. But now with the knowledge of death in his head there was a certain relief. Actions if any which he dreaded before could be performed now.

"Cassie!" he called, resting his elbow on the pillow and his face in his hand.

"Well, what's up now?" asked the woman, coming to the door.

"Are ye goin' to Mass?" asked Eamon.

"Not this mornin'," said Cassie. "I'm just goin' down to Paddy Friel's for starch and soap and candles and flour. The morrow's the day iv the washin'."

"Ye'll pass Cathal Cassidy's house on the way," said Eamon.

"Aye."

"Tell Cathal if ye see him that I want to speak to him," said Eamon. "If he'll come up this way till we've a talk."

"What d'ye want him for?" asked Cassie. "Be the way iv it ye'll have all the people iv the parish stravaigin' all through the house."

"If ye don't tell him to come up, I'll get from my bed and go down myself," said Eamon in a weak voice.

"All right, ye plaisham, lie down and I'll tell him to come up," said the woman.

IV

On the bed lay a varied assortment of rags, bottom-worn trousers, draggle-tailed skirts, petticoats of many colors, crottle-gray, bog-brown and sunburn-blue, all thinned to such threads by years of wear that they could no more support a patch than a rungless ladder could support a thatcher. Eamon's everyday clothes were there, his woolen wrapper, his shirt and corduroy trousers, even his socks, worn at heel and toe, were woven into the ragged web. But despite the poverty of the room, the dishevelment of the bed and its drab surroundings, there was something which caught Cathal's eye the moment he entered, something that

shone in the obscurity as a lone star often shines in the darkest night when all other lights heavenly and earthly are steeped in gloom. This was Brogan's dicky and tie. They lay at the bottom of the bed, both together, a symbol of glory that was gone and greatness that had departed. And under this heap of rags, petticoats and patches, which had only one relieving feature, the tie and dicky, lay the owner of the tie and dicky, Mr. Brogan.

On hearing the door creak he sat up in bed, and looked at the visitor.

"Mr. Cassidy?" he inquired in a weak voice.

"It's me, Eamon," said Cathal with a smile. "Are ye gettin' better?"

"I'm progressing," said Eamon quietly. "I feel empty inside iv me somehow, but I've no desire for beverage. Cathal, I want to ask ye something," he said. "Come over here to the bed, please."

"Iv course," said Cathal, going across to the bed, leaning both hands on the stock and looking at Eamon. "I'll do anything in me power to help ye, Eamon."

"Well, I want to know one thing before we proceed with others," said Mr. Brogan, fixing a timid glance on Cathal. "And that is, did you see her?"

"Who?" asked Cathal.

"Herself!"

As Eamon said this something in his tone reminded Cathal of Peggy Ribbig speaking of the Deity whom she feared more than she loved.

"Cassie Shemus Meehal!" said Cathal. "I've just met her and her on her way, be the look of it, to the shop for something."

"Did she look as if she was in a hurry?" asked Eamon, in a tone of mystery.

"Just much as usual," Cathal replied. "She's always in a hurry when she's doing anything."

"True, true, Mr. Cassidy," said Eamon with a sigh. "Now we'll proceed to business."

On saying this the invalid sighed several times.

"But afore that, will ye look out be the window and see what's to be seen on the road?" he inquired.

Cathal did as he was directed. Then he came back to the bed.

"Nothin' to be seen," he said.

"Nothing!"

"Not a soul about."

"Herself isn't on the way back yet?" asked Eamon in a whisper.

"No, she's not down at the shop yet," said Cathal, wondering what Eamon was about. True, report had it, and not without grounds, that Cassie had the life and soul scared from her husband. However, she would surely not be hard on a sick man. But probably Eamon was suffering from delusions. Sickness so often makes a man queer in the head, Cathal knew. "She'll not be back here for an hour at least," he assured the invalid, who now, apparently deep in thought, seemed to be paying no heed to Cathal.

"An hour," said Mr. Brogan, awaking after a lapse of five minutes from the reverie into which he had fallen. "An hour! Then the course is clear! Listen! . . . Come closer and listen!"

Cathal drew a chair to the bed and sat down. Mr. Brogan eased himself upon the pillows, stretched his neck forward till his lips rested on the ear of Cathal Cassidy.

"It's a matter that has been the curse of my life and the curse of more lives than mine of which I'm going to speak, Mr. Cassidy," said Eamon in a low, mysterious voice. "The ways of Providence are strange and beyond the ken of our philosophy. Mr. Cassidy," he suddenly exclaimed, turning from a deeper subject to a lighter one, "what is your opinion of dancing?"

"I think there's no harm in it," said Cathal. "It's a good pastime."

"I grant you that, Mr. Cassidy," said Eamon. "It's a good pastime while it is a pastime, but there are times when it leads a man into sin—"

"We are all weak, Mr. Brogan," said Cathal.

"But some are weaker than others," Eamon replied. "Just have another look through the window, Cathal, will ye?"

The young man rose from his seat, went to the window, gazed down the road for an instant, then came back to his chair again.

"She's not in sight yet, Mr. Brogan," he said.

"That is excellent," said the man in the bed, again sitting up and bringing his mouth close to Cathal's ear. "That is good . . . the course is clear. . . . The man who has fallen may raise his head from the mire, but not me, Mr. Cassidy. In my youth I committed a grave error, a crime against God and man. Passion seized me and I fell. I dropped from an altitude and wallowed, Mr. Cassidy."

Cathal's gravity gave way a little. Putting his hand on his mouth he feigned a burst of coughing.

"A cold has caught me," he said as he battled with the rearrangement of his features to a pose of requisite gravity. There was something exceptionally funny in Mr. Brogan's confession as he lay there, curled up in the huddle of rags, his head wobbling on his wizened neck like a big cabbage on an attenuated runt.

"I have fallen," Eamon proceeded as if he had not heard the remark made by Cathal. "I have fallen far, and by that fall many have suffered. If I was the only one who suffered I would not mind, but there are others. . . . There are others, Mr. Cassidy; there are others!"

"Don't be getting into a flurry, Eamon," said Cathal in an effort to calm the man who was now in a great state of excitement. "Just lie down and take yer aise. Come the morrow you'll be all right and able to get up and about with the best of them. Everybody that I know, Eamon, has the best opinion of ye. Not a one in the place has ever a hard word to say against ye, at all."

"That's because they walk blindly," said Eamon. "I'm a man of sin, Mr. Cassidy, a man of sin. And I have money, too, so much, and it's there! Give it to me, Mr. Cassidy. It's there!"

He raised his hand and pointed to a corner of the room where the heap of turf was piled in an angle of the wall.

"It's there!" he said. "Turn over the turf and ye'll get it in under and it in a box with an old shirt over it. Just look and see, Mr. Cassidy. But mind the window first and tell me if herself is on the road back yet!"

After looking out and assuring Mr. Brogan that Cassie Shemus Meehal was not yet in sight, Cathal proceeded to turn the turf over. He did the work mechanically, with the sole idea of humoring the sick man, and was surprised when he came to the bottom of the heap to find there a bundle wrapped in a piece of rag.

"Is this what ye mane?" he asked, showing it to the sick man.

"That's it," said Eamon in excited tones. "Open it now, and see what's inside."

Cathal took it up to the bedside, unshirted the parcel, and disclosed to view a little tin box which had once been used by Cassie Shemus Meehal to store tea. He had seen this box on the last occasion that he visited the house, nine years before.

"Open the box and disclose the treasure," said Mr. Brogan.

Cathal raised the lid. Under it was a pile of wool packed tightly. He lifted the wool, to find beneath it a nest of sovereigns.

"All my own," said Eamon excitedly, reaching for the box. "Fifty pounds here. Fifty pounds in gold."

He emptied the money in his hand, then without counting it he put it back again in the box and replaced the wool.

"Put it in yer pocket, Mr. Cassidy," he said. "Plank the lid on and put it in yer pocket, in yer breast pocket, and put a safety pin if ye have one, and keep it from fallin' out."

"But I don't want to keep this," said Cathal. "I may lose it and then when you want it back I'll not have it to give you. I'll tell yer what I'll do, Mr. Brogan. I'll keep

it till Cassie Shemus Meehal comes back from the shop and then I'll give it to her."

"Put it in yer pocket to please me," said Eamon in a hoarse voice. "Into yer pocket and I'll tell ye who ye're to give it to. I'm a vile man, Mr. Cassidy, and Fate was hard on me, but harder on others!"

He paused, shook himself, and lay down. His face was strangely white, and beads of sweat stood on his forehead. His eyes closed as if shutting out the world for a moment while he contemplated the meaning of his last utterance. Cathal held the box in his hand and stared at the lid. Mr. Brogan was delirious, he thought, and recollected that the whims of a sick man should be humored. Mr. Brogan sat up again and glanced at Cathal.

"Mr. Cassidy," he said abruptly, as if he had suddenly come to a vital decision. "Mr. Cassidy, I have something to tell you. I trust you more than any man in the parish, than any man in the world, if it goes to that. I have a bad sickness on me and maybe it's not long for this world that I am. I see everything clear as day now. I know what to do, and if you help me I'll die easy. Cathal, that fifty pounds, all that I can get my hands on, I've handed to you and I know that you'll do with it what I ask. When I'm dead I'll rest easy—"

"But you're not going to die, Eamon," said Cathal. "The morrow ye'll be up and able to get about just the same as any one."

Eamon shrugged his shoulders with the confidence of a man who knows that his own prophecy is certain.

"When I know that I helped her in some way," he continued, taking up the thread of speech where Cathal had interrupted him. "Go to her and hand her the fifty pounds and tell her that it was from a man that owed her as much and a million times more. But don't give her my name. It's anonymous."

"But who is it?" asked Cathal.

"Maureen O'Malley," said Eamon.

"But where is she and why?" asked Cathal in a startled

whisper. "She left here and no one knows where she is and for what are ye giving her this money?"

" 'Twas a dance at Neddy Og's, one Candlemas nineteen years ago, and I had a drop too much," Eamon said in a droning voice as if he were reciting something which he prepared long beforehand.

" 'Twasn't her fault and it wasn't mine. Kathleen Malley, so proud and high spirited, would have nothing to do with me. Many's the time she called me a plaisham, and what did it matter with a drunk fool that had no sense in his head. There are people who will get drunk by mistake and them havin' no taste for whisky. That was Kathleen O'Malley the night iv the dance at Neddy Og's. And I didn't know anything about it till the child was born."

"Maureen O'Malley!" Cathal exclaimed.

"Maureen O'Malley," Eamon assented in a whisper.

"You?" Cathal inquired, but to this question the man gave no answer. He turned his back to Cathal, pulled a crottle-gray petticoat round his neck and burst into tears. Cathal placed the box on the bed beside the dicky and tie and went to the window. He looked along the road where it stretched over the brown moor towards the sea. On it he could see a figure in gray coming towards the house. Cassie Shemus Meehal was coming back. Cathal returned to the bed.

"Is it the truth that ye're telling?" he asked in a faltering tone as if something was choking him.

"The honest truth," said Eamon without turning round.

"And Searlas Dhu O'Friel?"

" 'Twas only the people's talk, that."

"But are ye sure?"

"Sure as I'm lyin' here, Mr. Cassidy," said Eamon, twisting his neck and looking at Cathal over his shoulder.

"And ye let her go out into the world without one penny piece to help her—and her yer daughter," said Cathal, his voice rising in anger. "And ye held yer head up all the time and never made an effort to save her, to do the right thing. And now ye come up with this dirty box of gold.

Will it pay the girl for what she has suffered, and for what she is suffering wherever she is now?"

"It took me nineteen years to save the money," said Eamon in a piteous voice. "I gave up the smoking for to make a penny here and a penny there. And then I had other money goin' out to somebody that knew me to be what I am and blackmailed me."

"And served ye damned well right," thundered Cathal. "Pretending that ye were this and that and what not and now to see what ye are. Oh! Mother iv God! Mother iv God!"

"I make no excuses," Eamon mumbled. "I'm a scoundrel, but I would like ye to take that money with ye to her. She's beyond the mountains, and maybe if ye go to the next Strabane fair comin' ye'll see her there and give it to her. Say nothin' at all, but hand it to her. There, I hear a foot on the street. It's herself, Mr. Cassidy. Put it in yer pocket and—quick, Mr. Cassidy, there she is, there she is!"

With a movement almost mechanical Cathal grabbed the box and shoved it into his pocket as Cassie Shemus Meehal opened the door.

V

In the corner of the boreen where on one momentous occasion nineteen years before Mr. Brogan saw the light gleam through the blind of the Meehal's house, Cathal sat down and rested his head in his hands. Along the road he could see the people on their way to Mass, some in groups, others singly, all bound for the chapel of Stranarachary. An hour ago Cathal had dressed with the intention of going to the service, but now, a prey to irritation and anguish, he decided not to go.

His heart was filled with an intense repugnance towards Eamon na Sgaddan. That this pitiable fool, this spineless creature, should be the father of Maureen! There was something so utterly repulsive in the confession made by the sick man, something so humiliating for Maureen, so

maddening for Cathal that it was with difficulty he kept himself in the shackles of restraint. Mr. Brogan, the laughing-stock of the parish, the butt of the ribald, the slave of a mannish wife, and the father of Maureen! Better anybody than he. Maureen was put to shame and humiliated. The harassing impression that weighed on his mind caused Cathal to groan with anguish. He took the purse of money from his pocket, gazed at it with a shudder, then threw it into the undergrowth that lined the lanes.

Cathal knew from his school days that Maureen O'Malley was an illegitimate child and placing his faith on common report believed that Searlas Dhu O'Friel was the father of his sweetheart. That Searlas would have married Kathleen if Fate had spared him was a common assumption, but Searlas died, and the mishap, a committal of two, became the sufferance and dolor of one. Obloquy satisfies no instinct, even the vilest, when thrown at the indifferent dead. It needs something living, something which it can tear and lacerate, which quivers in sensitive anguish at a stroke or scratch! Such vituperative contumely fell on Kathleen O'Malley and through her on the girl, Maureen, and for all this Mr. Brogan was responsible. But could it be possible? Cathal questioned. That Mr. Brogan could be guilty of such a misdemeanor savored of the grotesque, but it must have been true. Else why this astounding confession, this purse of fifty pounds? Was Mr. Brogan delirious?

The thought of the scholar became suddenly odious to Cathal Cassidy, and the heart of the young man was filled with bitter resentment. Searlas Dhu O'Friel he never condemned, firstly because the man was dead and secondly because he had never known him. In the third place, Maureen was something which existed for Cathal since the beginning of things. Knowing everything, as he thought, he fell in love with her, accepting her for what she was, because he wanted her.

Now Mr. Brogan, the father of the girl, came in on Cathal's consciousness in a strange, unexpected form. Here was the man to be blamed, the man whose action was

in a measure responsible for Cathal's unhappiness, and the unhappiness of Maureen. If Mr. Brogan had married Kathleen, Maureen would never have run away and hidden herself in the obscure corners of the world. Perhaps even now she was suffering with pain that might have been averted if Eamon Brogan had done the right thing.

"I should have pulled him from his bed and strangled the swine!" said Cathal furiously, rising to his feet and fixing an angry gaze on the house that he had just left. Then turning round he saw the purse which he had thrown away. Touching it mechanically with his boot he turned it over, then bent down, lifted it and put it in his pocket.

At that moment he heard a light footstep behind him. It was Eileen Conroy on her way to Mass.

"Cathal," she said in a low, self-conscious whisper, "who'd have thought iv meetin' yerself here! I'm late for chapel and came down the near cut."

"Aye, Eileen," said Cathal absently, a strange ring of anguish in his voice. "But ye're not as late as that."

"Ye're comin', too, aren't ye?" asked the girl.

"Not the day," said Cathal, looking at Eileen with child-like directness, though his words seemed to be sticking in his throat.

"Not the day," repeated the girl. "And ye're lookin' that funny on it, Cathal," she went on, noticing his troubled expression. "There's nothin' wrong with ye at all?"

"Nothin'," said Cathal in the same troubled voice.

"But ye're not comin' down the road, then?" asked the girl.

"Yes, I think that I'll go," said the young man, shaking himself, as if waking up to the performance of a necessary duty. "It'll be a nice walk with the day so good."

"It's the grand weather and all that we're havin' now," said Eileen. "All the hay in in the parish, bar that iv Sally Rourke, poor woman, with nobody to help her, and maybe it's the wet weather that'll come before she has any iv hers saved."

"But some iv us will get on the job the morrow," said

Cathal, struggling to evince an interest in something which would keep his mind off the confession which Mr. Brogan had made. "Three days of this weather will help to save all her hay, once it's cut down."

"That it will," said Eileen, who seemed, like Cathal, to be under the stress of some peculiar feeling. When she spoke her voice sounded husky, the words it fashioned of no import but seeming to be squeezed out from others to which she dared give no utterance.

"Well, I hope it doesn't rain, anyway," said Cathal, fixing an awkward glance on the pretty, wavy hair of the girl.

"I hope the same," said Eileen.

They followed the boreen to the main road. The churchgoers, the last save Cathal and Eileen, could be seen turning a corner half a mile in front.

"We're very late," said Eileen. "The Prayers before Mass will be past be the time we get there."

"I suppose they will," Cathal replied, with a gesture of indifference. "I'm nearly always late, anyway."

They walked half a mile in silence. From the distance came the sound of the waves breaking over the rocky teeth of Gweenora Bay, and suddenly nearer came the sonorous ring of the church bell.

"We'll hardly be in time for the first Gospel," said Cathal. "I never care to go in this late."

"Then if we go back?" said Eileen, drawing in a deep breath.

"But I must go," said Cathal, quickening his step.

"And ye weren't wantin' to go much at all when we were in the boreen," said Eileen in a petulant tone.

For a moment Cathal dropped thought of the confession which Eamon na Sgaddan had made that morning. He looked at Eileen and fancied he saw something strange in her demeanor. Her eyes were fixed on him, and she panted a little as she tried to keep pace with Cathal.

"Am I goin' too quick for ye?" he asked, slowing his pace. "It doesn't matter, Eileen. We'll be in plenty iv

time, anyway. . . . Won't we now?" he added, seeing that the girl did not answer him.

She came to a dead stop, looked on the road as if in quest of something which she had dropped and burst into tears.

"What's wrong, Eileen Conroy?" he asked, a look of concern mantling his face. "Has any one done anything to ye?"

"No one," she stammered. "Cathal Cassidy!"

"What is it, Eileen?"

"I want to tell ye somethin'," she said in a choking voice, fumbling with the corner of her shawl.

"Yes, yes, iv course, Eileen. Whatever it is," he stammered in a helpless voice.

"I'm goin' away the morrow," said Eileen. "I'm goin' away to Strabane, beyont the mountains. I had word from Maggie Kurnew and her place is a good one and they want another servant. They bought a new farm, the people that she's with, and . . . and I'm goin'."

"It'll be better there than here," said Cathal, relieved to know that Eileen's sorrows were of such light character. "Maggie Kurnew has stopped two years in the place," he said, "and if, when you're there—"

He stopped, the words dying on his lips, but Eileen guessed what he was going to say and a look of intense agony showed on her face.

"But that wasn't what I was goin' to tell ye," said the girl. "It was somethin' else, and I'll not tell ye now, Cathal Cassidy."

"Tell it to me, whatever it is," he said in a coaxing voice.

"Never, never," said the girl, in an emphatic tone. "Never at all because, Cathal Cassidy, ye're as cruel and cold as a mountainy stone. Ye've no heart at all in ye!"

As she spoke she looked at him for a moment, burst into further tears, and turning, went back the way she had come.

VI

The congregation was rising to the first Gospel when Cathal, unobserved, entered the church. The white-haired Father Dan officiated. The Gospel finished, all knelt again. Though Cathal knelt in the hind seat, the near worshipers, conscious of a strange presence, turned round, and their curious eyes set in moist, swarthy faces made him feel very uncomfortable. It seemed as if these were aware of all that had taken place that morning.

He turned bead after bead of his Rosary mechanically, his mind a whirlpool of complexity. He moved his lips in the formality of prayer, but his thoughts were dwelling on things beyond the ken of explanation. Everything in the church was to Cathal mysterious, fantastic and foreign. Confusion and mystery had broken down Cathal's world of verities. There was nothing true and stable. He placed his Rosary in his pocket and fixed his glance on the priest who in the incense-laden atmosphere seemed an immeasurable distance away.

He looked again at the people near him. All were happy and hearty, and their very sighs seemed to express a certain thankfulness for some luck which had befallen them. It was a day of thanksgiving to God for the weather which he had sent them, for the corn stacked and the hay saved. All the harvest in the parish with the exception of Sally Rourke's was garnered.

The Gospel of the Day was read, the prayers for the living and the dead of all nations and in particular for those lately dead in the parish. Followed a short sermon by Father Dan who took for his text the third Commandment: "Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath Day."

"A Cara Yeelish," said the priest. "This is a story of a thing that happened once on a time when the Son of God, Jesus Christ, walked this earth like an ordinary man, when he healed the lepers, comforted the afflicted and had the kind word for everybody, even for those that were taken in sin. It was on the Sabbath Day and He went into a

house where the Jews gathered together on the Sabbath. Amongst the crowd there was a man with his hand withered. And the people gathered round Christ and asked him: 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath Day?' They were wanting to get the Son of God into a corner so that they might accuse Him if He acted contrary to the law of Moses. Christ when he heard their question, answered saying: 'Now if any of you had one sheep and it fell into a hole on the Sabbath Day would you not take it out? Then if you could take a sheep out, why not help a man, for he's of much more account than a sheep? So therefore it's quite lawful to do well on a Sabbath Day.' With these words the Son of God looked at the man and said, 'Hold out your hand,' and the man did so and Jesus Christ made it as well as the other.

"But on the other hand if a man wanted to go out into the market and sell a sheep at a good profit on the Sabbath Day, do you think that Christ would look with favor on the job? No fear. You can help a neighbor on the Sabbath Day, but you are not allowed to trade with him, for that is a sin, a mortal sin. But on the other hand it is lawful to do well.

"Even to-day you can see a chance of doing well to a neighbor, especially you young men from the townlands of Meenarood and Meenaroodagh. You all passed the holms and braes on Widow Rourke's farm, and you all saw that the good woman hasn't a cock of hay up or a stook of corn down. Here's a chance for ye all to get your scythes and reap a path to Heaven.

"Go home now, when this wee sermon is at an end, get your scythes, thrust up yer sleeves, you young men with shoulders as broad as a half-door, and set to work on Widow Rourke's farm, and cut down her hay and corn. I'll be with you at the job, for I'm goin' to have a hand at the mowing myself, just to show you that your old parish priest can sharpen a scythe and cut a sward with the best of them!"

Across the dyke that surrounded the church was the home of Father Dan. When Mass was at an end he went

towards the door, but on seeing Cathal Cassidy following him he stopped and waited till the young man approached.

"And how are ye, Cathal Cassidy?" asked Father Dan.

"Rightly, father, thank you," Cathal replied.

"And Sein Fein?" asked the priest with a smile. "Is it getting on well?"

"It's a good horse, father," said Cathal symbolically.

"But will they not break it in?" asked the priest in a tone of banter. The old man kept aloof from politics. A fourth of his parishioners were not Sein Feiners. On principle he refrained from showing sympathy to any particular party.

"They're tryin'," said Cathal, "with one hundred thousand bayonets. It is the kind of self-determination that they allow a small nationality. . . . But there's somethin' else that I'd like to talk to you about, father," said Cathal. "That's if you have the time to spare."

"Come in then, and sit down and have a smoke," said the priest, opening the door and ushering Cathal in. He showed the young man into his study, where a number of books were piled in all conceivable corners and where the plates for the man's dinner were laid out on a table in the center of the room. The old man placed a chair for Cathal and asked him to sit down.

"And have a smoke, too," he said, putting a tobacco pouch on the table opposite the young man.

"I've come to talk t'ye about somethin'," said Cathal, taking his pipe from his pocket and holding it in the fork of his hand. "I want your help in a matter."

"Tell me everything, Cathal," said the priest, his kindly voice grave and quiet. "Just speak to me as you would to yerself. Whatever ye say is between the two of us."

He looked at the young man as he spoke. Cathal's nostrils quivered, the hand which held the pipe shook, and he seemed to be undergoing some great internal conflict. All at once, and without saying another word, he got to his feet, put his pipe back in his pocket, took out the ragged spring purse and put it down on the table in front of the priest.

"What's in there?" asked the old man in a voice streaked with curiosity.

"Fifty pounds," said Cathal.

"Then you're going to get married," said the priest, jumping to a pert conclusion. "It's the way with boys."

"I'm not going to get married," said Cathal. "That money is not mine. . . . It's money for Maureen O'Malley, wherever she is."

Then with some effort at the start, but with a growing sense of relief, inspired by the confidence and sympathy of the old man, Cathal told in brief the confession of Mr. Brogan, dwelling at some length on the pain which rankled in his heart at the duplicity of the scholar. When Cathal had finished, Father Dan rose to his feet and with his hands behind his back paced up and down the room several times. Having known for years the mishap and those responsible, the boundaries of the net in which they were held and the circumstances of the occasion, Father Dan had long since arrived at a certain tolerant decision, which though not righting a wrong did much towards limiting its effects. The results of a mishap were in a measure modified by keeping Cassie Shemus Meehal in ignorance. Nothing could be served by letting the woman know of her husband's delinquencies.

The priest seated himself again and looked at Cathal.

"If we consider this case from what is known to all, what do we find?" he asked, then continued without waiting for an answer: "Eamon was away in Scotland, the last time he ever went there; and when he came back, what happened?"

"The dirty scoundrel was drunk and Cassie Shemus Meehal got her claws on him," said Cathal angrily, whether with Mr. Brogan or his wife it was impossible to say. "One of them's bad and the other worse," he went on in an angry voice. "The woman greedy as the devil and the man sly as Satan. A crawlin' snake, that's what he is, making the life of Maureen that's gone, God knows where, a misery, a hell on earth!"

Father Dan listened, one elbow on the table, his head resting on his hand. For a moment he was silent. Then, raising his head, he glanced at Cathal, his eyes almost stern in their gravity.

"Do you know the Lord's Prayer, Cathal?" he inquired.

"I do," said the young man bluntly. "But in this case it serves no purpose."

". . . forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," said the priest in a calm, grave voice. "Has it ever struck you what that means, its inner significance?"

"Of course it has," was the obstinate assertion of Cathal, who felt somewhat annoyed at being catechized in this manner. "But what has it at all to do with the man up there?"

"This," said the priest. "You go down on your knees every night and say the Lord's Prayer. You ask God for pardon of your own sins and promise in recompense to give forgiveness to those who have sinned against you. Call it a contract if you like, and if you do, ask yourself how do you keep your part of the bargain. If you give a man your word at the Fair over the sale of stock, you'll keep it, but when you give your word to God you don't keep it. Do you know, Cathal Cassidy"—Father Dan got to his feet—"do you know that Mr. Brogan shows more Christian feeling than you do? There's proof of it"—he pointed at the purse which lay on the table. "He has scraped and pinched to gather this money to make amends to one whom he has wronged. He is conscious of the wrong that he has done, and he would do anything to right it!"

"He has been a long while in righting it," said Cathal.

"Maybe he's like the rest of us in many ways," said Father Dan quietly. "So many of us are going to do the right thing. We're going to do it to-day, but we leave it off till to-morrow, and when the morrow comes we leave it off till the day after. But I think Eamon Brogan had more backbone than most people. He was certain of his way. He gave up his tobacco, even, and that for nineteen

years to do the right thing to the girl whom he was responsible for. Wouldn't you call that something towards making amends for a transgression, now?''

''If a man's in my position, he cannot reason as calm as you can, father,'' said Cathal resentfully.

''Are you in love with Maureen?'' asked the priest.

''I am, father,'' said Cathal with open frankness.

''And you don't know where she is?''

''No.''

''And you've never had word from the ones that goes to Strabane to the hiring-fairs of ever seeing her there?'' inquired the priest.

''I've never seen her,'' said Cathal. ''And I go to the fair three times a year, always on the look-out for her. She's lost, gone into the darkness like a spark up a chimney.''

Cathal got to his feet, looked at Father Dan, then without taking the purse from the table, without even saying a word, he went out and made his way up the road home.

When he reached Meenaroodagh he found that a number of people were already at work on the lift of the brae behind Sally Rourke's house, swart men, coatless and elbow-free, breaking the front of the meadow with gleaming scythes, in their train the couchant swaths of lush grass. A number of girls who had come out to shake the hay were seated at the butt of the field, chattering, laughing and making merry. One was singing, and Cathal as he strode along could hear the words of her song:

''The nations have fallen and thou still art young,
Thy sun is but rising when others have set,
And though slavery's cloud o'er thy morning hath hung,
The full noon of Freedom shall beam round thee yet!
Erin, my Erin, though long in the shade,
Thy star shall shine out when the proudest shall fade!''

The song was one of bitter import, of wrongs unforgotten, of indignities which the body forgets but the soul remembers; the lash which lacerated a nation's husk but fanned the vitality of her soul.

The song that brought back memories of the past to the

people, spurring them forward to the new day, the fresh renascence, gladding their hearts towards a future, struck a chill into an empty void when it fell on Cathal's ears. A past recent but fearfully remote came to his mind, chilling him with the gloom of despair. The song was one which he had often heard sung by Maureen O'Malley. . . .

THREE ROSES

On her breast were three roses,
And she stirred the stirabout-pot.
"Where have you got the roses,
And are you married or not?"

The sparks sang up the chimney—
Her brave eyes were so bright.
A pink rose and a red rose
And a rose bog-blossom white.

"Where did I get the roses?
That's what I'll tell to none,
And how can a girl be married,
And her by herself alone?"

The white neck in my elbow—
The tumbled breasts of desire!
And the roses petal by petal
Dropping into the fire.

The white and the pink and the red rose
Sobbing into the flame,
One couldn't tell where they went to,
One couldn't tell whence they came.

CHAPTER VIII

The Two Girls

I

TWO years passed, and in the house of the Farmer McKenna lived the girl Maureen, her former depression gone, leaving in its stead the dreamy hopes of youth and the vague desires of healthy girlhood. She had now grown to her full height, a comely lass, bright and agreeable, the talk of the Glen of Corngarrow in which she found herself and an object of admiration for all the boys of the place.

The steading was a good one, with a kind mistress and a frank, good-hearted master. When Maureen came there, having no roof for her head otherwhere, the master told her to remain until such time as something better turned up. She could help the Donegal girl already there to do the housework, but of course she would not be paid any wages. McKenna was a poor man. One servant girl was sufficient for the household, so as a temporary measure he offered to keep two, feed them and pay wages to one. But at the end of the summer term the girl who was hired went back to her home and Maureen stepped into her shoes. From then she had remained in the place.

The farm was excellent, so much superior to the houses of Thornton and Baxter that Maureen, accustoming herself to the place, felt quite happy, and her mind pictured a future free from remorse and care. The past, so cold and gloomy, made way for a present life so full of hope that the girl's imagination overflowed with life and light. It was good to be alive, to be young and happy.

Betty McKenna, the mistress, took to the girl, watching

over her as a mother might do. In the evening the household went down on its knees praying together in Irish. The farmer was proud of his knowledge of the ancient tongue.

"Not many bar me and herself," he often said, "knows the old tongue in Corngarrow. It is fast dying out, and that's a bad thing. A country without a tongue of its own is like a man that hasn't a voice. He's dead, and a country that can't speak its own tongue is dead, dead as a nail."

In the summer Maureen got up at seven, in winter she got up at eight. Then she milked the cows, made the byres and did the various odd jobs of the farmyard. Betty McKenna did the work of the household, the cooking, washing and darning, always on her feet early and late, a hearty woman, vital as a schoolgirl.

Sunday was the day that Maureen loved. Then she could go to Mass, over the hills to the little chapel of Cliddagh, where the country girls gathered together and spoke, as girls will do, of their various love affairs, the dances they attended, and the boys whom they knew. In their company, with her past a secret, the girl felt free of that restraint which cast its chill over her when she lived in Dungarrow.

Still, she never forgot her native place. It constantly recurred to her, the life she had known there, her mother who was so good and kind and unhappy, her friend Eileen Conroy, and her lover Cathal Cassidy. She had never heard from him since she left, since she disappeared from his life. Probably he did not know what had happened to her. There was no one to tell him of her whereabouts and her life beyond the mountains.

Since she had come to McKenna's she had never left the place, never gone beyond the boundaries of the parish. When other girls went away from their places to the hiring-fairs of Omagh and Strabane she remained in her house. She did not want to see the Dungarrow people if any of them happened to come to the fair. Old acquaintanceship was not to be renewed. She had cut herself off from the

friends and enemies of her youth for good, and forgetfulness slow but sure nipped at the fabric of sorrow, tearing it away bit by bit until scarce a trace remained. She still prayed for her mother, but the keen anguish and bitterness of two years ago had become dulled and insensible. Even Cathal was now nothing more than a sweet remembrance. Grief and love need their fuel or both die out and are obliterated.

The girl was known to the McKennas as Maureen O'Malley. She had been in the house for a week, living under an assumed name, when the wrong of her falsehood struck her forcibly and she went to the good woman of the house and confessed her pardonable duplicity. When the confession came to an end the woman caught the girl to her bosom and burst into tears. Then Betty McKenna went to her husband and told him the true story of the unhappy girl. He listened in silence until the woman had finished, then getting to his feet he struck one toil-bitten hand against another and exclaimed:

"That Donegal girl goes out from this house when she wants to go and not before. I like the look of the cub's face."

II

It was coming near the end of August. Two years had now passed since the day on which Maureen O'Malley stole away from the parish of Dungarrow.

"Go down to Saugh Faddagh," said Betty McKenna one morning, "and take the cows with ye, Maureen, and put them in there afore milkin' time."

Maureen loosed the cows from the byre and drove them along the field-path, scarcely traceable amidst the grasses. The songs of birds filled the hedgerows, and the sky above, pale and cool, was filled with a million striped clouds, filling, forming and fading away. Long filaments of spider webs stretched on the branches and the grass, floating in the air and brushing against the girl's face. The lane was a path of daisies that peeped from amidst the

grasses, their big eyes fixed on the girl. In front the cows paced soberly along, waving their tails lazily, as if they had not yet fully awakened from their night's sleep.

She drove them into the Saugh Faddagh, closed the gap behind them and leant a moment on the rail taking stock of the country in front. Field after field, the country stretched away into illimitable distances, rising here over a hillock, losing itself there under a spinney or village and ultimately blocking its perspective against the forests and plantings of Baronscourt that stood on the horizon.

Maureen became suddenly conscious of somebody strange who was standing across in the next field, a barefooted girl in a checked blouse and a red flannel petticoat. There was something Donegal in that red flannel petticoat. Maureen had seen her neighbors in Dungarrow wear such articles of apparel. She had worn a red petticoat herself. In fact the sight of that petticoat brought back memories of her native place. In it was something homely, traditional. Who could the girl be?

The farm across the boundary ditch belonged to a family sib to the McKennas, but, the man of the house dying, the woman had sold the farm and had gone away. Some rich farmer, his name unknown to Maureen, who lived down near the village of Drumfinnagh, had bought the farm and was using it for grazing-ground. McKenna belonged to the district of Drumfinnagh, but being on the outer boundaries of the parish and nearer the church of Cliddagh, which belonged to the next parish, Maureen never went to the chapel of Drumfinnagh. There were many Donegal cubs down there where the land was richer and the farms bigger, but Maureen, wishing to cut off all old relations and memories, never went there on Sundays.

She gazed at the girl across the dyke and fancied that she saw something familiar in the attitude of the stranger. She crossed the fence and went towards her. The girl with the red petticoat watched her coming, hitting the grass idly with a stick as she waited for Maureen to approach. As Maureen came nearer, her feet rustling in the grass and scattering showers of dewdrops to the ground,

she kept her eyes fixed on the girl with the red petticoat.

"It cannot be her," she muttered, not taking her eyes from the strange girl. She rubbed her hand over her brow, brushing back the hair which fell down on her face. "She wouldn't be here, not her!"

But all the time she was certain that this was the girl who had been her friend in youth, the chum of her childhood, the confidant of many a girlish longing, Eileen Conroy. As Maureen came near she could see clearly the face she had known, the gait, the attitude, the head drooping slightly sideways as if listening to something on the ground at her feet. Though apparently looking down, she was gazing under her lashes at Maureen.

"Eileen Conroy!"

"Maureen O'Malley!"

They embraced, kissed and burst into sobs, Maureen feeling so happy that she could not refrain from crying, Eileen so surprised at meeting her friend that this involuntary fit of weeping was the only way in which she could express her gladness. Tears are not the property of grief alone.

The very souls of the girls trembled as if they would suddenly forsake them as dewdrops in a breeze forsake the flower to which they cling. Their hearts full of thought, they clasped hands, kissed, looked into one another's eyes. Now and again Maureen faltered, "Yourself, Eileen," as if she were unable to realize the bodily presence of her friend. "And yourself, Maureen," Eileen would reply in a whisper, the tears running down her cheeks.

Gradually they began to speak, their conversation questions and answers.

"And are ye long here?" asked Maureen.

"Since last Monday week," Eileen replied. "Maggie Kurnew wrote home, saying that them she was with got a new farm and asking me to come."

"And ye've left yer mother?" asked Maureen.

"She's dead, God rest her," said Eileen, crossing herself and sighing. Maureen also crossed herself and said a prayer.

"Was it sudden?" she asked when she had finished.

"Just went away," said Eileen. "Took to the bed one night and was gone the next mornin'. And her so hale and hearty on it from every one's way iv thinkin'. But it had to be, for 'twas the will iv God."

"And the other ones iv Meenarood and Meenaroodagh?" asked Maureen, after a few minutes' silence. "Are they all well?"

"Maldy Kennedy's gone, God rest her, as well as Nancy Logan," said Eileen. "And the boys that's out at the war, there's more than enough iv them that won't be ever comin' back. The two years past were great years for death," she continued, with a mournful shake of her head. "And yerself?" she inquired, embracing everything in the question. But without waiting for an answer, she went on: "It's better lookin' that ye are than when ye went away. The life must be easy on ye here."

"I'm in a good place now," said Maureen simply.

"And we saw yer name in the papers," said Eileen. "Was it all right?"

The girl was really inquiring if the fact of getting in the papers was not followed by dire consequences.

"It didn't do any harm to me," said Maureen. "I didn't want to get in the papers, but I couldn't help it."

"There was a lot iv talk about it at home, and some iv them were sayin' that ye'd get a lot iv money for it. But I stuck up for ye, and I said that ye'd never sink to that, Maureen O'Malley. But then the way that people will be talkin'."

"I know that," said Maureen. "That's the reason that I left Dungarrow."

"We wondered where ye were off to and what ye were goin' to do," said Eileen. "And I was that upset about ye goin' that I couldn't get to sleep for nights after."

They embraced again.

"And d'ye mind the night afore ye left," said Eileen in a whisper. "Maybe it was out iv me head that I was at the time, but when one looks back on what's past there's many a silly thing. . . . And he's just living the same as ever," said Eileen, replying to a question which Maureen

had not asked. "He's great on Sein Fein, and he's the head iv them in Dungarrow."

"Who?" asked Maureen in a whisper.

"Himself," said Eileen sadly, as if lamenting something. "Himself. Cathal!"

"Oh, indeed," said Maureen in a voice of indifference, which the flush rising to her cheeks utterly denied.

"He's just the same as ever," said Eileen. "The same, but not altogether the same. That is to me, anyway."

"How? In what way?" stammered Maureen, her sensitive nostrils quivering slightly. Then in a tone of feigned indifference she said: "Well, people do change a lot one way and another!"

"Aye, Cathal has changed," said Eileen in an agitated whisper. "He has changed more than any one in the place. It's funny the way that people change when they get a bit older. One day they look at things one way and the next day they change. They change, Maureen O'Malley! It's the way with men."

The girl was now speaking in tears. They gushed from her eyes and down her cheeks.

"Is it in trouble that ye are?" asked Maureen. "Poor Eileen."

"Just the same as ever, Maureen," said Eileen nervously. "Ye never see any wrong in anybody. Always the same, Maureen. Just now as well as when ye left home. Ye're far and away better than any one that I know."

"If that's all ye've to tell me and us not meetin' for two years, I'd better be gettin' back to my place," said Maureen, stepping back a pace under the mock pretense of escaping from her friend's laudation.

"But I mane it," said Eileen, gripping Maureen's hand and raising it to her lips. "I mane it, every word iv it, the same now as when we were together at home, Maureen. Ye believe me, Maureen, don't ye now?" she appealed in a reproachful voice. By the way she spoke it almost seemed as if the girl was offended by the thankless acceptance of a favor bestowed.

"Iv course I believe ye, Eileen," said Maureen. "Ye

were the only friend that I had when I was at school. And ye were always good to me."

"Weren't we the best iv friends, Maureen?" asked Eileen excitedly, as if she did not yet fully believe in Maureen's assurance.

"Of course we were," said Maureen. "The best of friends then, and we're the best iv friends now."

Eileen looked at the hand which she still held and raised it to her lips again. Then folding her friend she pressed her close to her bosom.

"We're friends," she repeated. "And, Maureen, I'm sorry for ye."

"Why?"

"Because he has given ye the go by," said Eileen. "Him that ye thought would stick to ye through thick and thin. But it's the way with men," she added hastily, as if feeling that a statement dealing with generalities would lighten the fact of Cathal's faithlessness. "It's men always and ever. They're the same wherever they are. And anyway ye'll never be goin' back again to Dungarrow."

"Oh! I was never goin' back," said Maureen bravely, feeling at that moment that she never wanted to return so much. "I didn't run away for nothin'."

"And ye're never goin' back at all?" asked Eileen eagerly.

"Never," said the girl. "What do I want goin' back there and it so hard to get on with the Dungarrow folk, them with their backbiting and slander, even when I was wee and not able to do harm to anybody at all?"

"And never goin' back?" asked Eileen with confiding curiosity.

"Never," said Maureen; then, as if this decision was an excuse for any question, she asked: "And how has he changed?"

"In a way that I was the last person in the world to expect," said Eileen, bending down and rubbing some clay which had gathered on her toe with her finger. " 'Twas only the day before yesterday that I came to know. 'Twas the post that brought me a letter from Cathal and says he,

'I'm sorry that ye're gone, for Meenaroodagh is not the same without ye. I wish,' says he, 'that ye hadn't took it in yer head to go across the mountains.' ''

She stopped, fixed a look, half defiant and half frightened on Maureen. It seemed as if she had done something of which she was afraid.

"He said that?" asked Maureen in a voice that was strangely calm and controlled.

"He said that," Eileen replied, dropping her head sideways and looking at the ground.

"In a letter?"

"In a letter."

Both looked at one another, a dull surprise darkening Maureen's eyes as if something which she never anticipated had happened. Eileen plucked timorously at her red petticoat and fixed her eyes on the ground again.

"And you've left him?" asked Maureen in the same calm, even tone.

"But I didn't know what he thought till I came away," said Eileen, speaking hurriedly, almost incoherently, as if frightened at her own words. "He was always distant to me, and it wasn't very often that he would stand and speak to me on the road when he met me."

"And ye're goin' home now to him?" asked Maureen.

"When the term's up," said Eileen. "It's then that I'm goin' back."

"Is yer place a good one?" asked Maureen in a faltering voice. Her face was terribly pale, the features a token of the thoughts which sped through her mind. Everything seemed blank, hopeless. A martyr on the wheel might feel something similar if it were proved that his God was non-existent.

"It's a good place," Eileen whispered faintly, a peculiar uneasiness clutching at her heart.

"Well, it's time I was back at my place," said Maureen suddenly, fixing an intense look on her friend. "I'll see ye the morrow, and we'll have a talk about . . . about . . ."

Something seemed to choke the girl. She reeled back-

wards a step, then steadied herself and without another word went away, leaving Eileen standing there, looking after her with troubled eyes.

Maureen came to the gate, lifted the upper cross pole and clambered over. Blind to everything, she walked down the lane, holding her head very high and thrown back a little as if in defiance to the world. At the same time her eyes were running with tears that streaked her cheeks and trickled round the corners of her lips. There was an expression of pain, mental and physical, about the brow and eyes, in the pose of the body, which despite the high head seemed to shrink into itself like a snow figure in the heat of the sun that sparkles from every facet even when dwindling to pieces.

She went down the lane, past a hedge that stood erect and foliage-heavy by the side of the path. Unconsciously Maureen was aware that this hid her from the girl to whom she was just speaking, and here Maureen collapsed on the ground, limp as a fallen rose-petal, and burst into tears. She was half stunned, too deadened by the disclosure of Eileen Conroy to consider the matter from a sane light. She felt that a judgment was loosened upon her, that in some way the calamity which was hers had been something deserved.

"It was my fault," she mumbled, scarce knowing what she was saying. "I seemed to do the right thing when I left him, but now it looks as if it was all wrong. Oh! God help me! It's nobody's fault only mine. Ah, Cathal!"

She got to her feet again, slowly, as if an unseen hand was pulling her back to the ground. Something rustled on the path near her. She raised her eyes to find Eileen Conroy standing a little distance away, looking at her.

"Maureen O'Malley!"

"Ye're not away back to the farm yet?" asked Maureen.

"Not yet," said Eileen, "I've somethin' to say to ye! Guess what it is."

She spoke brightly, almost cheerfully, though the corners of her lips drooped ever so slightly.

"I cannot guess," said Maureen.

"It's about Cathal," said Eileen. "When ye went away from me a minute ago I thought and thought, and then—"

She spoke loudly but suddenly stopped as if her strength had been withdrawn.

"—and then," she went on in a lower voice, "I saw what I was, a bad person."

"But you're not a bad person," said Maureen, a gleam of hope sparkling in her eyes. "Ye were always my friend, and ye're me friend now, the same as ever, Eileen."

"It's about Cathal Cassidy," said Eileen, coming back obstinately to her subject. " 'Twas a lie that I told ye when I said that he wrote me a letter. Cathal won't write to anybody; he'll hardly speak to a girl in the parish, because he doesn't want to, with yerself on his mind. Every fair iv Strabane he's there lookin' for yerself, but he doesn't know where ye are and . . . and . . . Maureen O'Malley, go home to Dungarrow again with ye, and get married on him! He wants yerself and no other one at all in all the world. If he was married it would be easier for the rest iv the world, Maureen O'Malley. He wants ye and no one else. Go back to him, Maureen!"

These words came from the soul of poor Eileen. Drowning and unable to hail the ship that would save her, she clutched at the floating wreckage which at its best would only prolong her agony.

"I didn't mean to tell you the lie, Maureen, but I couldn't help myself, because I love him more than my own life, more than God in heaven," said Eileen in a voice of anguish. "And then I was ashamed when I told the lie to ye, for I love you, too, and I ran after ye. He loves yerself, Maureen, and he's breakin' his heart after ye, and ye so cruel to him. Go back to him, Maureen! Go back to him!"

The girl spoke loudly, almost hysterically as if to drown the torments of her own soul.

"Promise me that ye'll go back as soon as ye can," she went on. "Promise me that, Maureen."

"I promise."

"The morrow?" asked Eileen, her lips quivering.

"The morrow," Maureen assented. "But we're friends, Eileen, now as always, aren't we?"

She held out her hand to the girl, but Eileen drew back a pace.

"And ye'll be there the morrow night," she said.

"If I'm let away," said Maureen.

"And ye'll see him the morrow night," said Eileen sadly. "Oh, my a my!"

"But, Eileen, are we not goin' to be friends?" asked Maureen, again reaching out her hand to Eileen. But the girl took no notice of the gesture.

"Maureen O'Malley," she said with a piteous look and with the air of one who pronounces a verdict that cannot be gainsaid, "Maureen O'Malley, we can't, the two iv us! With him between us we can never be friends!"

With these words she turned round and ran back to her cattle, ran as if flying from something terrible and ghastly.

III

That night when evening devotions were at an end, and when Farmer McKenna drew his chair close to the fire to have a last pull at his pipe; when Betty McKenna commenced darning a sock that needed a thread or two in the gaping hole in the heel, Maureen O'Malley approached the woman. She was going to request something, but indirectly, from Farmer McKenna.

"Well, Maureen," said Betty, looking up at the girl. "Is it to bed that ye'll be goin' now? It's time, too, for ye've had the long day."

"I met one from my own parish this mornin'," said Maureen. "It's a girl that's hired to the man that bought the farm marching Saugh Faddagh."

"And are they all well at home?" asked Betty McKenna.

"Well, middlin'," said Maureen. "There were a lot iv deaths one way and another."

"That's always the way," said the man by the fire.

"People do be dyin', but it's the way iv things if one gets old."

As he spoke he pressed the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe with a rugous thumb and fixed a contemplative eye on the fire.

"And there are people that ye know yerself that has gone, God rest them?" asked the woman.

"More than one," said Maureen sadly. "And then others, the young fellows that have gone away to the war."

"Lost forever to Ireland," said McKenna with a sigh.

"It's always the way with boys," said Betty. "Where there's divilment and mischief their feet are always goin'."

"I would like to go back to Dungarrow," said Maureen suddenly.

Betty looked up at her and placed the stocking on the floor. The man drew the pipe from his mouth, struck the bowl slowly against the leaf of his hand and stared at Maureen.

"Home, Maureen?" he said in a surprised voice. "And after tellin' me that ye'd never go back!"

"And no one at all there sib to yerself," said Betty.

"It's just for a wee run to see the place, is it?" asked McKenna.

"For good," said Maureen, in a low voice. "If ye just give me a couple iv pounds to get clothes ye needn't mind about the rest iv the money."

"Well, ye're a funny girl," said the man. "Goin' away now with close on two years' pay lyin' in my hands and waivin' yer rights to it! Damn it! but it's the silly wee fool that ye are, Maureen!"

"But ye're not goin' to keep her money back from her?" said Betty, a little terrified even at the suggestion.

"Well, I could do it," said the man. "But that's not sayin' that I will do it. It's all lying in the bank at interest, and maybe it's two pounds or a little over that in interest that it has made for the girl."

"But ye've no home to go till," said Betty, looking at

Maureen. "And ye've a home here. Ye're the same to us as one iv ourselves."

"I know that," said Maureen. "And I can never repay the two iv ye for what ye've done for me since I came here."

"Then why are ye runnin' away?" asked James McKenna, putting the pipe back in his mouth without lighting it.

"I'm just goin' home," said the girl. "I want to go back again."

"But ye've no home to go to," said the man. "Ye've mortgaged it, and be the way ye were talkin' about goin' back there and only wantin' what'll pay for the train and a dress and a pair of boots, ye want nothin' else. How can ye have a home without payin' the mortgage on the farm?"

"Well, I'll pay for it out iv the wages," said Maureen.

"Well, of all the girls I've ever seen ye're the funniest," said the man, taking his pipe from his mouth again, hitting the bowl against his knee and putting it in his pocket. "First ye want to go away home and ye havin' no home. You don't want yer wages with one breath and with the next ye're going to pay the mortgage on yer land with the wages that ye do not want me to pay ye."

He rose to his feet, stretched his arms over his head and went to the door leading to his bedroom. Here he stopped for a moment and looked back.

"Just have a good night's sleep, Maureen O'Malley," he said. "Then think it over in the morning and let me know what yer mind is then."

He went into the room and closed the door behind him. As he did so the old woman looked at Maureen O'Malley.

"Come, Maureen," she said. "Sit down beside me and tell me yer troubles. There"—Maureen sat on the floor close to the woman—"just a bit closer." Maureen nestled in against the woman's knees, and Betty put her arms around her shoulders.

"Now," she said, coaxingly, "tell me all. He's a very

good man, but for all that, he's only a man." She turned her thumb towards the bedroom door as she spoke. "But after all there are things that he can't know. Girls will be girls always, and what can men know about them? Himself's a good man, one of the best, with heart for any kindness, but he doesn't know everything. Ye've trouble, Maureen. Let me know what it is, and maybe I can help ye."

"I have no trouble at all," said Maureen. "No trouble in all the world."

"But what was it that made yer eyes so red the day, and ye after talkin', as ye said yerself, to the Donegal girl across the ditch?" asked Betty McKenna. "What man's in it?"

"Man!" echoed Maureen.

"Young girls shed more tears about men than anything else," said Betty with the air of one wise in the sorrows of the young. "Shouldn't I know and me a girsha meself at one time?"

"Well, it is a man," said Maureen, suddenly emboldened by the tone of the old woman. "And he's one of the best in the whole world."

"He always is," said Betty, with a wise little smile wrinkling the corners of her lips. "Him that we set our hearts on."

"But there's not one in all the world like him," said Maureen. "He's that good and nice—"

"But he must be a funny fellow, with yerself away here and him never sittin' down and puttin' his pen in ink to write a letter to ye," said the woman, who noticed that ever since she came Maureen had never received a letter. "But maybe it was that ye had a fall out, or maybe it is that he hasn't the learnin' and can't write."

"He's a good scholar," said Maureen. "He's the head iv the Sein Fein in Dungarrow."

"So it was a fall-out?" asked Betty.

" 'Twas not a fall-out, either," said Maureen.

"Well, it's not me to ask ye what it was," Betty re-

marked with a formal sigh, "but if I can be iv any help to ye at all, let me know and I'll do everything that I can for ye, Maureen."

The woman, of course, was itching with curiosity, but with the high diplomacy of the kitchen she did her best to hide it.

"Well, I'll tell ye everything about it," said Maureen, and there and then beside the fire in the house of James McKenna she told the whole story of her love affair, her love for Cathal, the behest of her mother which had become a tenet of the girl's life when her mother had gone, and the promise to the dead, the keeping of which caused such anguish to the living. She told of the hurried departure from Dungarrow, the wandering by night along the roads with the dead urging her on and the living calling her back, the anguish, the yearning and the sorrow.

Having finished her simple narration of that which for two years had sucked at the essence of her life, Maureen looked at Betty McKenna. The old woman coughed angrily.

"Maureen, ye're a fool!" she said. "A silly, wee fool, that's what ye are. To think iv ye being here all this time and never lettin' on at all about it. If I knew . . ."

What she would have done if she knew the facts of the case was not disclosed at that moment. The dam of grief burst its control, and the tears streamed down the cheeks of the good-natured woman.

"No, no, Maureen," she said between sobs. "No more . . . I know all . . . I always thought it . . . Not a letter in two years, and you such a nice girl . . . *Beed a hosth,* Maureen, *beed a hosth*! . . . Say your prayers . . . Oh, ye've said them . . . Well, away to bed with ye then, and I'll hurry up James in the mornin' and get yer couple pounds and off and away with ye to yer own place."

The girl rose to her feet and went to the door of her room, but as she reached it the old woman called her back.

"Maureen O'Malley," she said, "when ye go home and if ye find any one that's up to any tricks with ye, back here with ye again and as hard as ye can pelt and tell yer

troubles to James McKenna. Mind ye, Maureen, he's a quiet man, but when he gets his tempers up, ah!''

The ah! was very expressive, hinting as it did the prowess of James McKenna in remedying an oppression and righting a wrong.

BREED ASTHOR

Come, cuddle closer, Breed asthor,
For youth will have its way—
The eyes so bright at Candlemas
Grow sad on Lammas Day.

There's bitter bliss in Lammas love
And sure in time to pass,
And wrinkle-rutted dreams of hope
Grow cold at Hallowmass.

Then cuddle closer, Breed asthor,
Ere time brings cark and care;
We'll catch the fancy born in flame
Ere it goes out in air!

CHAPTER IX

The Return

I

MAUREEN O'MALLEY had come back again. She entered the house which she remembered so well, the home of her childhood. It was greatly changed from the abode which she had known, as it well might be, for it had served the purpose of byre since she had left. In fact it was used for that purpose now, but was not used save in cold weather and on the occasion of market-days when Columb penned his cattle there. In the good weather the cattle were allowed to remain on the hills, day and night.

Nothing, in fact, was left to remind Maureen of the home which she had known. All the chairs had been removed, the table was gone, an iron stanchion was driven into the hearth for a cow-stake, the window was stuffed with bags, the floor was covered with dry dung.

In dreams, Maureen always saw the house as she had left it, the snug bed in the corner, the hassock on the floor near the hearth, the delf on the dresser arranged in just and gradual order, the picture of the Blessed Mother on the wall near the window. Of such a home she always thought with reverence and longing, but now that she was back again the recollections of the past veiled in a somber hue and newly-tried by the present occasion became dull and spiritless.

The huge flagstones on which she had once sat were now, where the drier portions of the floor betokened the resting-place of cattle, hoof-splintered in a thousand places, showing depressions and elevations all over its surface. Green

spots on the walls showed where the water oozed through, and the scraws of the roof bulged in where the rain-sodden thatch weighed heavily on the beams that bore it. The whole house carried in it the dire tragedy of disuse and decay; its moldy smells told of a place not used for many a long day as a human habitation.

Maureen placed her traveling-bag on the floor and went to the door, desirous of getting out to the fresh air, but without any idea of where she wanted to go. Home again and homeless, her heart was filled with a deep sorrow. Even now she longed for the kindly Mrs. McKenna in the cottage away in the Glen of Corngarrow.

Columb Ruagh Keeran came to the door and looked in, his eyes blinking, unable to pierce the darkness. Years had not changed him. He was still the same as when Maureen had seen him last, his heavy eyebrows projecting forward, his chin scrubby, his red shirt open at the neck and its sleeves thrust up over his elbows. Under his arm he carried the customary stick. Probably the shirt and the stick were the same as belonged to him years ago. It was said that he never washed. His face seemed particularly mild, the shock head of hair hanging down over his temples giving him a certain patriarchal air.

"Well, and what are ye wantin' here?" he inquired, sensing the stranger whom he was as yet unable to discern. "Are ye after anything?"

"No, Columb Ruagh," said Maureen. "I'm after nothin'. It's back home that I am."

"Mother iv God!" exclaimed the man, recognizing the voice. "Is it Maureen O'Malley that I'm looking on?"

"It's me, Columb," said the girl. "I'm just home."

"Indeed, Maureen," said Columb, apparently taken somewhat aback at the sight of the girl. "And how and when did ye come?"

"Across the hills," said Maureen. "It's just in now that I've come."

"Well, good day t'ye anyway," said Columb, stretching out his hand and gripping the girl's. "We never thought that we'd see ye ever again."

"Neither did I meself think that I'd ever be back here again, Columb," said Maureen. "But be the look iv this place now, I might as well never have come back."

"So ye're goin' to pay off the mortgage?" asked Columb.

"Maybe I will," said Maureen. "At one time I wanted to keep the home, but seeing it as 'tis now I don't think I will. I didn't even it would be a byre when I came back."

"But a house with not a soul to live in it is not worth the keepin'," said Columb. "The day after ye went away everything was taken out iv the house. 'Twas at night, and when I came to it the next day not a hilt or hair iv anything could be seen. They're great thieves, the people about here."

"I suppose they are," said Maureen. "Anyway, when there was no one in the house to take care of it, what could ye expect?"

"True," said Columb, fixing a keen glance on the girl and at the same time recollecting her as he had seen her years ago on the day that he mortgaged her farm. Something stirred deeply in the man's heart and sent a queer thrill through his body. What this queer sensation, so foreign to his nature, was he could not determine. "True," he repeated in a hoarse whisper. "There was no one in the house, and it was no good keepin' it as if one was expectin' visitors. And if ye've mind to sell it, well, it doesn't matter. But land has gone down in value of late ever since the war is on."

"And how are all the people iv the place now?" asked Maureen, thinking only of one, but hiding that one in the immensity of the question.

"Oh! livin' like always," said Columb. "Some, iv course, have died, and some haven't, more's the pity!"

Maureen smiled. She knew Columb, his perverted outlook and his calloused opinions of his fellow men, but as he was one with her early environment, one who was fused in the fabric of her youth, she listened to his castigation with toleration. Of course he did not mean what he said, and even if he did he was old Columb Ruagh, one of the parish people.

"Were there a lot married?" she asked.

"Aye, there were some married," said the man. "And some that thought they would get married are not buckled."

"And yerself isn't buckled yet?" asked Maureen with a smile.

"No, not yet," said Columb, wincing as if some one had suddenly trickled cold water down his spine and fixing the same steadfast look on the girl. "Not yet," he said. "But who knows what I may do yet?"

"But ye're gettin' far an' away too old for that now," said Maureen jokingly.

"Yes," he said. "But for all that, not so old. There are some, and they think themselves smart, that can't come up and near to me in many's a thing."

There was something strange in his voice that caused Maureen to look at the man in surprise. Even Columb himself felt a certain wonder at his own behavior, for he had never before spoken of his own assets to a woman. Why he did so now he could not explain.

"Well, well, it doesn't matter," he said, as if wanting to get rid of a troublesome discourse. "Where are ye going to sleep the night?"

"I don't know," said Maureen. "Maybe here if there's no other place."

"It's not a home for a girl after her bein' away so long," said Columb with show of crude sympathy crawling across his rutted countenance. "Sally Rourke will give ye a bed and supper for the night, I'm sure, or maybe Condy Heelagh's ones. Condy has a bed to spare after gettin' nearly all his ones married on good men. Maybe ye'll be goin' down there now."

"That's what I'll do," said Maureen, picking up her traveling-bag and making her way to the door. *"Slan leat,* Columb Ruagh!"

He watched her depart, and his eyes followed her down to the road. He saw her stand a moment outside the door of Condy Heelagh's house as if afraid to go further. He noticed the erect form, the head thrown back as if in a gesture of defiance. Thus for a moment, then she entered.

Columb came out into the sunlight again, sat down and fixed his eye on the house of Condy Heelagh. Two hours later he was sitting there, his gaze still directed towards the same spot; he was evidently in a very thoughtful mood, and something seemed to be weighing on his mind.

II

"Under God, the day and the night, Maureen Malley!" Peggy Ribbig exclaimed when she saw the young girl cross the threshold of the door. "Back to us again from wherever ye were!"

She rose from her hassock by the hearth, ran to the door, embraced Maureen, kissing her hands while the ready tears ran from her eyes to the girl's fingers. Condy was sitting beneath the window, his head over the back of the chair on which he sat, his mouth open and his arms hanging slack by his sides. The old man was asleep. Anne was also there, standing by the dresser where a wash-tub held the dirty plates of the last meal.

"Indeed," said Anne, the slow glance of realization which comes to one who is looking on something unexpected lighting her eyes. "Indeed, and it's Maureen!"

"Back again, sure," said Peggy with a tone of decision which seemed to hint that she, the old woman, was in a measure responsible for the return of Maureen. On the strength of this she gave Maureen another hug.

"Mother iv God!" said Anne, catching Maureen by the hand. "Who'd have thought iv ever seein' yerself back here again, that, after the way that ye went and left us all."

"Sit down, *ahaisge,*" said Peggy, drawing a chair up to the fire, wiping its seat with her apron and pointing Maureen to it. "Sit down, and, Anne, put the taypot on the greeshaugh."

Maureen sat down, and Anne put the teapot on the embers.

"Now," said Peggy, standing up as straight as her crooked back would allow, "now, Maureen Malley, off with

yer shawl and let us see what ye're like after all this time."

Maureen threw her shawl back and let it rest on the chair.

"The same as ever," said Peggy Ribbig. "Just the eyes and the mouth and the way that ye hold yer head, and Maureen, *ahaisge,* ye've not aged a day nor half a day since I saw ye the last time, well over two years ago."

"And yerself," asked Maureen, looking at the old woman, "how are ye gettin' on?"

"As well as can be expected," said Peggy with a rough sigh. "God is good and I'm old, but He doesn't want to take me away to Him as yet."

"And himself?" asked Maureen, looking at the sleeper who was now snoring heavily.

"Not so bad for an old one," said Peggy. "But the sleep's on him nearly all the day now. Maureen Malley, I've never in all me life seen one like him for the sleep. Not only when he's under the blankets but when he's up as well. And Nancy Logan, God rest her, has gone!" continued the woman. "And not only Nancy but Maldy Kennedy and Eamon na Sgaddan."

"Eamon na Sgaddan!" Maureen exclaimed. "Is he gone, God rest him!"

"The buryin' was three days back," said Peggy Ribbig. "And him, after all his long words, and his collar and tie, went just like any other one! Anne," she said, looking at the daughter, "what was the long word that Eamon said and him after gettin' the Holy Oil on him?"

"Incomprehensible," Anne replied. "The last word iv poor Mr. Brogan."

"There," said Peggy Ribbig. "The last word iv the man. He was lyin' on the bed with the Oil put on him, and him in a kind iv a dead faint. They thought that he was dead, but he wasn't, for he opened his eyes, and he looks up at the roof, and he says, says he. . . . What was that long word, again, Anne?"

"Incomprehensible," Anne replied.

"Well, that was the word that Anne's after sayin'," said Peggy Ribbig, making no effort to repeat it. "He

said that word, but there's not many in the place that knows what it means."

"What way did ye come home, Maureen?" asked Anne.

"I took the train to Kineeragh, and then I crossed the hills—" Maureen replied.

"And were ye up there at yer own house?" asked Peggy Ribbig.

"I was that," said the girl. "And it's a funny house entirely now with the cattle being in it."

"And where will ye be stayin' the night?" asked Anne.

"I don't know," said Maureen.

"Well, I know," said Peggy Ribbig with a voice of decision. "Up the brae with me own girsha, Hannah, and her man away at work in Scotland and no one in the house at all, bar herself and the childre, and her lonely be night and maybe frightened with the ghosts that bees about. She wants some one with her, and it's yerself that she'll be glad to have in the house, Maureen Malley."

"Thank ye very much, Peggy," said Maureen O'Malley, speaking quietly, though something seemed to be clutching at her throat. She was moved almost to the point of tears by Peggy Ribbig's kindliness. "It's far and away too much to put me in Hannah's house and the trouble that I'll be givin' her."

"Ye'll be givin' her trouble if ye stay long there," said Peggy in a tone which seemed to have suddenly captured a hard note. "If ye're under her roof for more than three weeks it'll be somethin' that her and meself won't approve of!"

"I have money, and I'll pay for my keep if she'll only let me stay," said Maureen. "But if I'm not wanted there, I'd be the last person in the world to go."

She got to her feet.

"Sit down, Maureen, *ahaisge!*" said Peggy in a tone of command. "Ye're a wee silly fool, the same now as ye were always! Sit down!"

"Don't take any heed iv her," said Anne, pointing her thumb at the old woman and looking at Maureen.

"Wrong again!" said Peggy in a tone of protest.

"Ye're not wrong," said Anne. "But the way ye have iv sayin' things so that no one understands what ye mean!"

Maureen fixed a puzzled look on the two women, then on the wrinkle-rutted face of the sleeper as if an explanation of the women's conduct would be found there.

"Always wrong whatever I do, by the way they talk," said the old woman in a querulous voice. "No matter what I say or do it's always wrong, but wait till they're as old as me and then—"

"I wasn't meanin' anything," said Anne.

"Ye're never meanin' anything, but ye're always talkin'," said Peggy Ribbig, glancing at her daughter. "I never saw the like iv ye in all me life . . . Maureen Malley," said the old woman, looking at the visitor, "sit down and I'll tell ye what the meanin' iv what I said was."

Maureen sat down again.

"This it was and nothin' else," said Peggy Ribbig, settling her body on the hassock and nursing her knees. "Ye're goin' up to Hannah's house, and I'll be that angry if ye say anything against goin' there. It's a snug house that she has; and shift and sheetin' second to none. And she can set a meal afore ye that'll do the heart iv ye good. So ye're goin' there, Maureen Malley, as I ask ye! And ye're not goin' to stay there for long! If ye don't go there I'll be angry, and if ye stay there longer than three weeks I'll be just as angry! Cause why?"

"I don't know, Peggy," Maureen replied.

"Iv course ye don't," said Peggy. "I was right in sayin' that ye're a wee silly girl now, as always. The raison that ye'll not stay there, Maureen Malley, is because ye'll not be allowed to stay there. One day, and that will be soon, ye'll go away, and all the wild horses iv the world couldn't keep ye from goin' away the day ye want to."

Peggy got to her feet again, and leaning her hands on Maureen's chair she whispered in the girl's ear:

"Ye'll be took away be a good, dacent boy, and that's Cathal Cassidy!"

III

That night when Maureen had finished her supper, Hannah, the daughter of Peggy Ribbig, who had just come in from the byre with a guggen of milk, went up to her.

"Maureen Malley," she said.

"Yes, Hannah," said Maureen.

"I saw a man out be the holly bush in the dark," said Hannah in a voice of mystery. "Maybe it'll be yerself that the man, whoever he is, is wantin' to speak to."

Maureen went to the door and out into the darkness. The night had fallen and the stars of heaven were sprinkled with a lavish hand on the sky from Crinnan to the sea. Everything was fresh and full of promise. Maureen, her heart elated with hope, went to meet him.

He came towards her with a smile, caught both her hands and kissed them, then drew her close to his breast. It was a moment without embarrassment or shame, snatched from the air and hugged with that greed which belongs to love.

"Oh! to think that it's wee Maureen," said Cathal, pressing his lips against her hair. "I can hardly believe it. But ye'll never go away and leave me again. Say that ye won't, Maureen, say that ye won't."

Tears came from her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. He watched them fall and glimmer. The dark night had light to spare for the stars of grief. She nestled close to him, raised her white face and looked in his eyes. His arm was under her neck and nestling there, her face was like a white bird in the heather of a moor.

They spoke in whispers, saying things almost without meaning, things that both felt but hardly understood.

"Ye love me, Maureen?"

"Always, Cathal!"

"And ye went away and left me?"

Both trembled and looked at one another in the darkness, their eyes lit with a brilliant fire. Almost without realizing it their hands touched and their lips met.

"Ye're never to run away and leave me again, Maureen."

"Never again."

They spoke of things silly and wide, of their hopes and dreams, the past now beyond their keeping, the future which lay within reach. They spoke as lovers always speak, as the ancient passion prompts anew, every day and every hour. The eternal love was theirs, they clutched at it with greedy fingers, their bodies palpitating with the passion that runs upward and outward, beyond the governance of the mind. Love, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, was theirs.

IV

The house of Condy Heelagh, lipping the highway, was a favorite resort of the Meenaroodagh and Meenarood rakers. Here on one night four weeks following the return of Maureen O'Malley a number of Condy's neighbors foregathered, and towards the hour of ten the kitchen was thick in tobacco smoke that almost hid the assembled company in its curtains. Cathal Cassidy was there holding a long discussion on something political with Liam Logan, Corney McKelvie and Columb Ruagh Keeran. In the corner near the fire sat Maureen O'Malley knitting a stocking, and Peggy Ribbig was beside her, engaged on a similar task and speaking in whispers to Maureen.

"He's a boy better than any," said Peggy with a sigh. "Not concaity like some iv them, and he has the lavish hand when a bargain's made. And dacent! One iv the dacentest in the barony and beyond it. Mark my words, Maureen Malley—and beyond it."

"That's true, Peggy," Maureen replied, a blush overspreading her face.

"Iv course it's the true word," said Peggy, raising her voice a little as if hinting that those who said otherwise would find an enemy in her. "I mind him and him not more than the height iv two turf, and I mind as well sayin'

then that he would grow up to be a strappin' man and a credit to the place. 'And the girl that'll get him when he's big,' says I, 'will have a man that she need not be ashamed iv!' "

Maureen moved her knitting needles quickly but made no answer.

"And it's the long and many's a day since I went to the chapel with himself," said Peggy, a reminiscent gleam in her eyes as she glanced at Condy Heelagh, who sat by the fire, his look on the flames. "But I never was sorry for takin' him, thank God! He was a good man to me and worked hard to keep the downdrops from the thatch, though like meself he's gettin' old on it now, poor man! And now, this day it's close on fifty years since I was married on him, and that's a good time surely."

"A long while entirely," said Maureen.

"Well, I mind the day and the days that went afore it as well as I mind yesterday," said Peggy with a sigh. "And it's a time to look back on that many years. . . . But, Maureen Malley"—she edged her hassock nearer the girl—"I'll tell ye what made it a good match more than anything. 'Twas the Doonwell."

The Doonwell, with water to heal body and soul, is a place reputed to possess especial holiness and is visited by pilgrims with religious intent. The well, situated in a wild and retired spot of Tirconail, has its sward hung with the rags, crutches and other memorials, the litter of the ailing which is testimony to the cures effected. The waters of the well were blessed by an ancient saint, and pilgrims from all parts walk there barefooted. The Well of Doon is some fourteen miles from Stranarachary.

"And ye walked all the way, Peggy?" asked Maureen.

"I was light iv foot then," said the old woman. "And I walked it there and back barefooted, the whole iv the way. But it doesn't matter a bit how ye come back. It's the goin' that counts, and it must be done in the bare feet to have the cure or the blessing. And my! wasn't I sore on it when I came home at night!"

"It's a hard journey for a person to put over one in a day," said Maureen. "What time did ye leave in the morn?"

"Long afore the birds shook themselves," Peggy Ribbig replied. "With the sun up I had more than half the journey there past me."

"I think I'll go then," said Maureen impetuously. "I can set out the morrow mornin' early?"

"Never too soon for a good job," said Peggy Ribbig with two sighs, one to head and one to tail the spoken word. She sighed thus whenever she spoke.

"Well, they're all leavin' now, so I must get away," said the girl, rising and looking at Cathal, who was also on his feet, gazing expectantly at Maureen.

V

As Maureen leant on his arm, Cathal felt the happiest lad in all the parish. Both gazed at one another, then at Condy Heelagh, bidding good night to the rakers. Good-by was a lengthy affair, so much had to be spoken of, little secrets perhaps, which were not to be known by every one. In fact, Condy Heelagh, who never wore a coat in his home, put one on towards midnight because it was so cold at the door talking to the departing guests of one thing and another.

"Good night t'ye, Condy Heelagh," said Cathal, as he passed with Maureen on his arm. "And to yerself as well, Columb Ruagh."

"Old Columb here yet and all the long road to Crinnan in front iv him?" asked Maureen in a merry voice, her heart light and the cares which she had known thrust away from her. Even Columb appeared to her in a changed light. He was not such a bad old fellow after all, though more than a little fond of the money. But he was getting old and had no one to take care of him when he would not be able to take care of himself. She called him old merely as a sign of friendship, and because every one else did the same.

A little distance along the road, the boy and girl came to a halt and gazed at the beautiful night with its myriad stars and the trees waving their long arms in the slight breeze. All was perfectly still, and sounds traveling from a great distance reached the ears of the two. From afar came the roll of the sea, and from the near hills came the rumble of brooks falling down over rock and ravine. Here and there a light glimmered steadily, and now and again one went out as if bidding good night. A dog barked from the heel-end of Meenaroodagh, and the bark, carried from brae to brae by the echo, repeated itself a thousand times before pulsing out to sea. Maureen listened to it for a moment, then with a smile lighting up her eyes she turned to Cathal.

"Isn't it quiet here, Cathal?" she said.

"Quiet's not the word," Cathal answered, gazing at her in ecstasy.

"And the trees shaking their arms!" said Maureen, looking at an ash by the roadside which waved against the stars.

"Aye, they're not leavin' many of them to the country now," said Cathal sadly. "One time this country was filled with forests, but there'll soon not be one tree left in all Ireland."

"What a pity," said Maureen, sighing also, though at the same time happiness welled up in her heart.

"But as long as you're here, I'll never miss anything," said Cathal, catching the girl's hand as he spoke and pressing it tightly in his own. "Now that ye're back here again there's nothing more that I'm wantin', Maureen."

She looked at him, and he could see a blush mantling her cheeks. He put his hand round her shoulder and drew her in to his body. Maureen made no effort to drag herself away. Thus they remained, the two of them, for a long time, plunged in dreams, after which both moved away in the direction of Maureen's lodging. She opened the door of the house, set one foot inside it, and then turning round quickly she held out her hand towards Cathal and asked in a whisper:

"Is it to Kineeragh that ye're goin' the morrow with your cart?"

"I am, Maureen."

"And what time will ye be passin' Crinnan cross-roads on the way back?" she inquired.

"Eight o'clock, maybe," he answered. "Maybe later, but not earlier."

"And if ye're there afore that time, will ye wait for me if I'm later?" she asked.

"Of course I'll wait for you, wee Maureen," said Cathal tenderly. "I'll wait there for ye till the Day iv Judgment and beyond if ye'll ask me. I've waited for ye so long without ye asking me that it won't come amiss for me to wait when I'm asked. And where will ye be, to be at Crinnan cross-roads at that time in the night?"

"It's to the Doon Well that I'm goin'," said Maureen. "And I'll be tired comin' back, and I'll not say no to a lift on the cart iv Cathal Cassidy."

"Well, I'll be there between eight and nine," said Cathal. "Columb Ruagh's house is just beside the road, and he has always a good fire on, and if ye're early ye can sit down there and warm yerself. I'll come along as hard as I can, once I do my business."

"Good night t'ye, Cathal, and a good sleep," said Maureen, drawing the hand which Cathal still held to herself and pulling the door to a little. "And thanks, thanks ever so much for what ye're goin' to do for me the morrow night."

"But there's one thing that I've to tell ye yet," he said in a whisper. "It's this."

He caught her hand again, drew her in close to him, so closely and tightly that she felt choking. He pressed his cheek to hers, her breast to his, all the little infinitesimal movements and shades of movements which love brings to its aid.

They were one black shadow in the doorway, lighter and darker tones of shading, lacking contour and outline. Now and again when they moved or changed position they could see a live coal glimmer on the ashes like a little wicked

eye, making sport at the passion, the moment's respite which love snatches from the drudgism of time.

A step was heard on the road; somebody was coming from the direction of Condy Heelagh's.

"Good night to ye, Cathal," whispered Maureen. "There's some one comin'."

"Let them come," said Cathal, releasing the girl nevertheless. "I know who it is. It's Columb Ruagh on the way home."

"Well, we'll tell him," said Maureen.

Columb came abreast. Cathal stepped into the middle of the road to meet him. The newcomer came to a sudden stop as a man that expects a trap, turned his head to the right and looked at the ditch, to the left and took in with a glance a sycamore tree, then at Cathal Cassidy standing in front of him.

"It's me, Columb," said Cathal. "Did you think I was a polisman?"

"No, not a polisman," said Columb in a gruff voice. "But it's as well to be careful in this arm iv the world, for one never knows what's goin' to take place."

"Well, that's true," said Cathal.

"But get any one tryin' their capers with me!" snarled Columb, taking the stick from under his arm and giving it a suggestive shake. "I'd soon let them know!"

"Old Columb wants to have a fight!" said Maureen, who was still standing at the door.

"And old Columb can stand up to the best of them," said Cathal.

Columb took his stick down, folded his arms and looked the younger man between the eyes.

"Aye, and indeed Cathal Cassidy!" he said in a slow voice which seemed to hide a threat. "Aye, and indeed! Old Columb can stand up to the best of them, be whatever they are!"

"True, true," said Cathal with a smile.

"To the best iv them and the very best iv them!" said Columb in the same threatening voice. "And many a one would be as well to have that in mind when they've any-

thing to do with old Columb, that's not maybe as old as he's hairy."

He spat violently on the road as if giving emphasis to his utterance, then without another word he disappeared into the darkness.

"He has a funny way and all with him," said Maureen from the doorway.

"That's old Columb!" said Cathal. "If a person didn't know him it would be hard to make anything of him. His father was something like him, I've heard."

"Yes," said Maureen, who had very little interest in old Columb. "Good night t'ye, Cathal," she said, turning to the young man.

"Good night," he replied and caught her hand again. He drew her towards him, rested his face on her hair and pillowed the small brown head on his breast. To see the beloved back from her grave of exile resting in his arms, her eyes as bright as stars when they looked up at him, pulling her lips back when he bent to kiss her, but allowing them to be kissed all the same, filled his heart with a mad, overpowering happiness.

When he went home that night, Cathal drew the blind from his window, put out the lamp and stared into the darkness. In front of him lay the whole townland of Meenaroodagh, with here and there a few late lamps still beaming out into the darkness. But Cathal only saw one, the light in the home of Maureen O'Malley. At length, when this light wavered and died out, Cathal turned in his seat, his soul afire with happiness, and said to himself:

"Wee silly brown head! Maureen O'Malley!"

Cathal's were not the only eyes that watched the window that night. When the paraffin lamp was turned down and the wick choked in the jaws of its burner, a dark form rose from the green outside Maureen's bedroom window, and a bristly, rufous face pressed against the pane as if trying to pierce with its eyes the fabric of the blind and the obscurity of the room. For a long hour it remained there, listening.

When the figure withdrew it did so on tiptoes. A space away it sat down, lifted a pair of boots from the ground and put them on. In the widely diffused darkness, where substance was shade and shadow substance, where silence oscillated as if in the throes of terror and the low continual undertone of night whispered of despair, the figure gathered to itself the animate manifestation of anguish and doom.

When it rose to its feet, the figure stood straight as a stake, form with no fixed outline, a ghost in the solitude. Suddenly it moved, changing its location in space without sound. At an oblique angle it made for the road. There, no longer hemmed by the confines of caution and secrecy, its hobnailed boots rasped on the roadway. The figure was that of a man, Columb Ruagh Keeran.

"Old!" he growled in a voice teemful of hate and acrimony. "Old Columb! I'd wring their necks!"

He stopped, ground his teeth, pressed one closed fist against the other and twisted both round in opposite directions as if wringing the neck of a chicken.

GARRYBAWN

It's Micky Fergus Diver, and he's only skin and bone,
With acres holm and heather, that, and money of his own—
It's all day long he's sitting with his elbow on the hob,
The crabbit Micky Fergus with his dudheen in his gob;
A near old scranny scrape-the-pot that's askin' dusk and dawn:
"Boy! are ye never gettin' on with diggin' Garrybawn!"

My gallowses are hangin' down and twistin' round my legs;
The girls can see the most of me that's stickin' through my rags;
It's dribs and drabs on back and front and freezin' to the pelt—
Ye'll see it's up to him one day and give him such a welt!
The close and scringy rip of sin that's at me dusk and dawn
With: "Will ye never hurry up with diggin' Garrybawn!"

Now if he'd let me to a dance, or better to a fair,
A penny whistle I would buy and learn a dancin' air—
I'd maybe whistle it at work, or wouldn't it be fun
To blow it right in Micky's face at night when work bees done!—
It's thrawn he is, the people say, but I can be as thrawn—
For Micky Fergus I can't stick, him and his Garrybawn.

But wait a bit till Old Hall'eve, and then you'll see my plan;
It's off from here I'll scoot to where they'll treat me like a man,
As good as any in the place, and not because I'm wee
They'll curl their gobs and think it smart, that looking down on me!
And three pounds comin'! It's a lot! Just wait till that is drawn,
I'll take the road from Micky's house, him and his Garrybawn!

CHAPTER X

Potheen

I

IT was the night following, the hour eight, the locality a cave on the Crinnan hills. This cave ran under the rocks, and far removed from human habitation it was a paradise for the potheen-distiller. The hill almost stood upright; to climb it by day was a feat, by night an impossibility for most men, but not for the owner of Crinnan, Columb Ruagh Keeran. It was here that the man pursued his work in the darkness.

The night was clear, though moonless, with a heaven of stars and a cold wind on the hills. Frost had set in, and the ground under Columb Ruagh's feet as he made his way from his cabin to the still-house was hard and crisp. He climbed the haunch of hill and arrived at his cave.

Within, near the entrance, was a circle of stones, in the center of which a turf fire burned slowly. Round this fire were a number of barrels, kegs, pails, pots and trenchers. On entering, the nose was assailed by the putrid stench of warm grain, barm and sediment of all kinds.

As he came in from the darkness of the night, the red-haired man hit the fire with his boot, causing the sparks to fly up through the gloom. Then he drew off his gray woolen wrapper and threw it into the corner with a quick, convulsive movement. He turned up his sleeves, spat on his hands and rubbed his palms along the legs of his corduroy trousers. The fire from the grate lit up his rufous face, blood-threaded, wrinkled, and unshaven. For a moment he looked round, staring into the black obscurity that bundled itself in angles, recesses and unfathomable corners as if cloaking something fell and hideous.

Even the world lighted by the fire was abject and filthy, the walls oozing with putrid moisture, the floor covered with scraps of decaying food, the droppings of sheep, and the sulprus sediment of the still. Water falling from the roof gurgled as it dropped in a slough on the floor. This water ran along a channel formed at the base of the wall and disappeared in the blackness, gleaming and glinting as if endowed with life. It looked like a snake crawling out from the firelight into some secret lair.

The man ran his fingers through the red hair sprinkled with gray, spat on his hands, rubbed them together and put one over his ear and listened.

"Not comin' yet, the bastard!" he growled, gnashing his teeth and wrinkling up his eyes as if the thought of something caused him unendurable agony.

Then with feverish animation he rushed into one of the dark corners and from there commenced to throw rocks and sods of turf into the circle of cave lighted by the fire. When a heap was collected he reappeared and built a little circle of stones, lit a second fire in it and filling a still with water placed it on the flames.

"Now, the vat!" he muttered, running into the corner again. He returned, rolling a large barrel-shaped vessel open at one end like a churn and having a plugged hole in the side near the base. This he placed on the floor by the fire.

Somewhere in the darkness and the corner was Columb Ruagh's storeroom. From this shadow-filled recess he brought out a sheaf of green rushes and a bundle of seasoned ash plants. These latter were peeled of their barks and cut to a level smoothness at both ends as if planed.

Inside the barrel, some six or seven inches above the plugged hole, were a number of small notches circling the interior wall. In these notches Columb fixed the rods so that they stretched across the barrel from one corner to another like laths of a corn-riddle. A spread of green rushes was laid on top and on these a sprinkling of white stones with the object of keeping the rushes in place and

preventing their being disturbed in the subsequent operations.

"That'll do! That'll do!" said the man, spreading out his hands on the rushes and thrusting the false bottom down with all the force he could muster. "It has the back iv a two-year-old, this bottom! Old Columb Ruagh that can't be bate at anything! See how I do it!" he shouted, addressing the blackness that surrounded him. "There's none iv the young ones can hold a candle to me. Old Columb Ruagh, indeed. Hah! I'll let them see, the rips iv hell! I'll let them see!"

As he spoke, this singular creature lay down on the floor, turned over in the slush like a colt in the grazing, all his motions impatient, grotesque and restless, as if a fiend were in his body forcing him to perform actions out of keeping with the governance of will.

He got up, rushed again into the obscure corner which was the storehouse of the mountain distillery. When he came out he carried two bags, one in each arm, the bigger containing twelve stones of barley meal, the smaller four stones of vat meal. Despite the weight, Columb walked quietly with his burdens to the fire, the supernatural brilliancy of his eyes seeming to ask imaginary onlookers to take stock of his prowess. Call him an old man, indeed! Old Columb Ruagh was as strong as the best of them, and stronger!

"Meal seed now!" he exclaimed, as he placed the two bags on the floor and went into the corner again. There was a sound as if he were stumbling over impediments, but presently something brown and bulky whizzed through the air and dropped on the floor, a poke containing two stone of meal seed; the inner husks of corn, which is amongst other things used by the thrifty housewives in the making of sowans.

"That's it!" Columb yelled, coming into the light again. "Barley grain, oat meal and meal seed. No sugar for me! Four stone iv it, and it costs a tidy penny now! No, none iv it for me, for old Columb. Farley Ronar didn't use it,

neither did Myles McMonagle, and them at their day the best on the job. It's a wild taste that it gives to the potheen! Into the vat with it, into the vat!" he roared, lifting the bags one after another and emptying their contents on the rush bed of the barrel. "Water on it, ye divil, ye, now ye're on the boil!" he cried, running to the still and lifting it from the fire and emptying its contents into the vat.

"That's it!" he cried, picking up a shovel-shaft which had been trampled into the filth of the floor, pulling it between his legs to clean it. With this he commenced to stir the contents of the vat, taking care not to dislodge the stones or disturb the rushes which covered the false bottom.

"Back! forrid! Lower it down!" he chaunted, stirring with all his might but so aptly that the false bottom was not disturbed. "Back and forrid, shovel-shaft! Through the stones and round them like a salmon through the tree runts in a river! I can see the stones through the triosg, and they call me old Columb Ruagh. Oh! the brats iv perdition! May the walls iv hell fall on them!"

Perspiration came out on his face, trickled down his forehead, cheek, and jaw, and ran in a stream through the red hair of his muscled chest. The liquid was now filtering through the rushes, and its gurgle as it dropped in the lower portion of the vat could be heard above the exclamations of the red-haired man. When he had stirred for some twenty minutes he pulled the shaft from the vat, threw it on the ground and arranged the buckets round the vat. Then, pulling the plug from the hole, he allowed the liquor to drip into the largest bucket.

Another barrel was taken from an adjacent stillion, and in this Columb placed a quantity of yeast, over which the buckets of liquor drained from the vat were poured. Two pints of hop-juice were added, and when this was thrown in Columb leaned on the rim of the barrel and looked down, seeing nothing, but hearing as in a dream the frothing of the simmering liquid.

He remained thus for some moments, leaning over the barrel in a limp, motionless attitude as if he had been flung

there after death. Suddenly he raised himself, went to the fire, lit a spale and came back to the barrel again. Looking in, he could see the contents quiver, rise up in little ripples as if a million eels were moving beneath. Huge bubbles chased one another across the surface, and a droning keen rose to the roof of the cavern, sank into the obscure walls of gloom which filled the place and died away.

"Old!" the man muttered, as he pressed the lighted end of the spale between finger and thumb and put it out. "Old!" he growled, then in a sudden fit of frenzy: "Ah! the divil fly away with them, the brats! I could buy them body and soul. Sein Fein! No, not for me, not for old Columb. Misha Fein is more like it. They can drink my potheen when they pay me hard money for it; they can go down to Stranarachary and with their bands and drums and fifes keep the polis watchin' them, and that's all I want. If the polis stay all their time in Stranarachary I am safe here! That's my way iv lookin' at it! All's on my side, everything. There's no whisky comin' to the town now, and that means increase for Columb Ruagh. Old Columb Ruagh! Ah! the dhirty pigs!"

Columb ceased for a moment but immediately was talking again, tramping through the cave, now uttering pure nonsense, again giving expression to something wise and weighty, but all his remarks filled with undying hate against some person or persons unknown. At times he held up his hands over his head as if calling to the darkness to listen and pay heed to his threats, again he thrust his arms to the elbows between the red flannel shirt and the neck of his trousers, leant his head sideways in a listening attitude and gazed towards the entrance of the cave as if looking for somebody to make appearance. "Will he never come in, the brat iv hell?" he asked himself more than once.

Suddenly he took from the corner of the stillion a pole round one end of which was bound a string of white thick cloth saturated with paraffin oil. This he thrust into the fire, stepping back a pace as it burst into flame. Drawing it out, he went to one of the corners where a second barrel

as full as the one already filled stood on a ledge. This barrel was covered with a lid weighted down with stones and bound with several layers of cloth to exclude the air.

He placed the torch on the wall, removed the lid from one barrel to another, then examined the one on the ledge. When last Columb looked in it on the previous evening, its contents were fermenting, with bubbles chasing one another across its surface. Now it was quite at rest, as placid as a spring well, colored a variegated blue and purple like paraffin oil. In this stage the liquor was named kilty, or wort. In some parts of Donegal bread and kilty are considered excellent repast even for a king.

Columb filled the still with kilty, added a few pieces of soap to the brew and fixed an air-tight cover on the still. From this tin cover projected a lead tube, with one end, twisted in a corkscrew fashion, leading downwards into a large keeve filled with the icy cold water which dropped from the roof. Through a hole in the side near the bottom the lower end of this tube, the worm, projected.

II

At that moment there was a movement at the entrance of the cave; a shuffling sound was heard, as if a piece of cloth was being pulled along the ground. A shade moved from the shadows and entered the circle of firelight. It was Micky Og, a workhouse boy, a youngster of thirteen who had been in Columb's service for some months. Micky's parents were tinkers.

He came up close to Columb Ruagh, who was now looking into the fire, his ridged and rufous face beaded with sweat and the tufts of his hair standing out in several ways, glistening like threads of gold.

"I'm here, back again, Columb Ruagh," said the youngster in a nervous voice as if afraid of having done something wrong in not being earlier in the cave. The big man gave the fire a poke with the toe of his boot, and as a burning peat fell outside the circle of stones he lifted it casually between finger and thumb and threw it into its place

again. Then without a word, but with a grim shake of the head, he glared at the youngster.

"I was down at the house, Columb Ruagh," the youngster began, speaking timorously as if repeating a lesson which he was afraid of forgetting, "and I waited, but not the hilt or hair iv a sound could I hear comin' from beyont the hills at the fut iv Binbawn."

Columb nodded his head, put a short clay pipe in his mouth, lit it and eyed the youngster up and down, contemplating the poor being, the offspring of the workhouse, with strange attention.

Micky was thin and pale, a pinched and sallow creature who looked as if he had grown up in some cavern out of sight of the sun. His legs and arms might have been at one time pulled taut as the strings of a fiddle, then released and allowed to curl up in all manners of ways. The elbows were drawn in against the sides, the knees touched one another, the heels met, and the feet, big and ungainly, rested flat as flukes on the floor. These were crusted with clay, now wet, but which, often drying, had chapped the skin, causing hacks out of which blood was constantly oozing.

The neck of the youngster, thin as a lath, held on its top a big head, its large eyes sunk in shadow, the corners of the lips turned down as if with continual anguish and worry. His long thin legs, naked to the knees, red and rough, were scarred here and there as if torn with brambles. He wore a pair of thready trousers, torn at rear and unpatched, and a woolen wrapper which Columb had used for years and to which he now came whenever he needed repairs for his own raiment. When he first entered service Micky had to thrust up the sleeves when working, but now the sleeves only reached the elbows, the missing parts having been used by Columb as patches for his trousers and coat. At the present moment Micky looked at Columb and noticed the knee of the man's trousers torn, so the boy knew that the master would soon make a further demand on the reserve of patches. In fact, the tragedy of waste and repair would in the course of time leave Micky perfectly naked.

"Well, and what's doin'?" asked Columb when his scrutiny came to an end. "Ye've been down there, haven't ye?"

"I have, Columb."

"And now?"

"I'm here, and—"

"Ye're here!" roared Columb. "Of course ye're here, ye bare-bone, herrin'-gutted rip. I'm not blind, am I? Is old Columb blind?"

"I didn't say ye were blind, Columb Ruagh," faltered the youth, stepping back timorously and overturning a pail.

"Don't go about as if ye hadn't an eye in yer head," said the red man in a hoarse whisper. "Look where ye're goin' and don't have two eyes but three when ye're here. Mind that! I'm yer master now, yer father, yer mother, yer God! Mind that and mind it always, or I'll make ye mind it with a stick. . . . There's her cumallye! There's her cumallye! Don't stand there with yer mouth open like a skaldy! Shove the bucket under the cock!"

The still had now been effervescing for a few minutes, and the "cumallye" to which Columb referred was the musical whistle which the worm gave forth as the escaping steam rushed through it and puffed out in vapor at the mouth. Columb, wise in the lore of his profession and versed in the language of the worm, was directing the boy to place a bucket under the spout to catch the clear and transparent stream which was now issuing from the worm.

Although clear in color and tasting of whisky, the first issue of the still, "singlings," was not really fit to be drunk. When all this had been drawn the process would be repeated, and the product of the second operation would be called "doublings." Properly speaking, it would be called doublings when coming through the worm. Once it came out it would be known as "potheen." But on this occasion the second process was not put into execution. In fact the first was not completed. When the first bucket was filled and the second put in its place, Columb spoke to the youngster.

"Did ye light the lamp when ye were down there?" he asked.

"I lighted it, Columb Ruagh."

"And put it out when ye came away again and put the hasp on the door and raked the fire?" asked Columb.

"I didn't do neither, because there was somebody there," said Micky.

"Who was there?" asked the man, bending down over the boy and grabbing him by the shoulder. "Who in under heaven was it? What was the person's name? Tell me, tell me, and don't be a dummy!" Columb knitted his brows viciously and shook the boy.

"Maureen O'Malley, from the butt iv Meenaroodagh," said Micky, his teeth chattering and his whole body quivering nervously.

"Maureen O'Malley!" Columb exclaimed, releasing the boy from his grip and stepping back a pace. For a second he stood as if petrified, then slowly shoved his hands down between shirt and trousers and emitted a low whistle. He fixed a puzzled look on the boy, then on the ground, and then on the boy again.

"Maureen O'Malley!" he repeated. "What is she on the lookout for at this hour iv the night, and what does she want in the house below?"

"She was at the Doon Well," said the youngster, his large eyes lighting up with a certain pleasure at knowing something which interested Columb Ruagh so much. "She was there the day, and on her way back she was to meet Cathal Cassidy at the house below and drive home with him on the cart."

Columb's face lighted up with a strange expression. A hungry smile curved the corner of his lips, his reddish eyes looked down as if contemplating something which lay at his feet. A fox with human lineaments might look in the same way as it stands on the mountainside and surveys a solitary lamb caught in the briars of a gully beneath. When he raised his eyes again and looked at the boy he saw that the youngster had drawn back into the

shadows where his vague outline had almost become merged with the gloom. He was gazing at Columb with a glance of fear and suspicion, feeling that his master's look boded evil for somebody.

"Here, ye whelp!" said the man, beckoning to the youngster with his finger, "come closer, closer yet. I want to speak to ye."

Micky approached his master, who reached out and caught him by the ear.

"I want ye to go to the foot iv Binbawn and look under the knowe that's in under the hobeen nearby Cruckna Copall," said Columb, speaking slowly and weighing out his words as if they were of exceeding value. "Ye know the place, don't ye? It's there that the carters put the jars and the meal seed for me when they take the Doochary road from the foot iv Binbawn. The jar will be an empty one and covered up with Cheena to hide it from the eye of the polis. Ye know the place, don't ye?"

"Ye're twistin' the ear off iv me, Columb Ruagh," said the youngster. "Lemme go, won't ye?"

"There, then," said the man, giving the ear a vicious tug before releasing his grip. "Now, don't ye know the place?"

"I know it," said the youngster, again edging out of the way and rubbing his ear.

"Well, ye're to go there across the braes, not be the road, mind, and get the jar," said Columb. "And when ye get it, keep an ear open, and if ye hear any cart comin' at all tell the driver that Cleena Bridge is down, that it fell in the middle of the day when a heavy cart was goin' across it. Mind that. What bridge is down?"

"Cleena Bridge," said the boy.

"That's it," said Columb. "Cleena Bridge, and when Cleena Bridge is down the carts to Dungarrow will have to go round Binbawn down the Doochary road and not pass be the house below. It's for their own good that ye'll let them know, for it saves them four miles to the bridge and four miles back again to the foot iv Binbawn when they find that the bridge is down. And keep your eyes

skinned for the polis,'' added Columb. ''*D-tuigean thu?*''

''*D-tuigean,*'' said the youngster. ''I'll scoot over the braes if I smell them.''

''And if ye meet a person don't tell them who ye are or where you come from,'' Columb went on. ''A good lie is more handy than a supple leg many's a time. Don't tell the cart-drivers who ye are, either. If they ask ye where ye are bound for, say to the back iv Sliab League or the back iv Beyond. In this job a close mouth is the best answer to many's a question. Now hook it as if the devil from hell was at yer heels, and if ye fall don't take time to rise. And mind that Cleena Bridge is down when ye're talkin' to the carters. Hook it!''

The boy stared in terror at Columb for a moment, then began to tremble at the knees and after a second took to flight and without turning his head rushed from the cave into the darkness.

III

Five minutes passed, and Columb remained standing still in the same attitude, his head bent forward and both hands thrust down on his hips between trousers-waist and shirt. He drew his breath in slowly, holding it for long intervals, then exhaled violently. His eyes, red and contracted under the beetling brows, were fixed on the mouth of the worm, through which a thin stream of liquid fell as slowly and soberly as castor oil poured from a bottle. The fire was dying down; the peat turned to ash, and now and again a stone, loosened in the circle, fell inwards and dropped into the fire or outwards and sank with a sough in the slush. Suddenly the sound of effervescence ceased, and the run of liquor into the bucket by the keeve came to an end.

Columb Ruagh shivered, feeling the cold air of the cave, buttoned his red shirt and lifted his gray woolen coat from the stillion. Glancing at it, he saw that several blobs of mud were sticking to it on the tail, the lapel, the collar and sleeves. Some of these blobs were perfectly dry,

others newly formed were moist and damp. The garment was almost worn threadbare, and holes gaped under the armpits and at the elbows. As Columb looked at these he could not help recalling the snugly groomed young men who went to church on Sundays and attended the Sein Fein demonstrations in Stranarachary.

"And not a penny among them to rattle on a coffin, and all the time I could buy them body and soul," said Columb defiantly. "Old Columb, too. Ah! the whelps!"

He took a knife from his pocket and scraped the clay from his coat, starting the job at the collar and finishing at the tail. Then, having snipped the strands of cloth that stuck out from the armpits, he put the coat on, went out into the darkness and made towards the house below.

He went down the hill, clambering over rocks and ledges, gripping a mountain ash that grew on the edge of a cliff and stepping out into space. For a moment he would swing in the void as his boots felt blindly for the projection which he knew was there. Finding it and securing foothold, he would let the branch go and listen as it swung back again with a swish to its original position. Then he would continue his journey, clambering down inch by inch, finding, by some mysterious instinct known to himself alone, a footing on the smoothest rock and purchase on the flimsiest ledge.

Coming to a gully through which ran a turbulent stream, he followed its course as if by magic, jumping across whirling pools with the most perfect self-assurance and landing safely on the other side. For half a mile he followed the bed of the stream, springing from stepping-stone to stepping-stone in the dark and never losing his footing. When he left the gully he began running down the braes that led to his own home. After covering a few hundred yards he stopped, put his hand over his ear and listened. Not a sound to be heard, and the night so clear and calm that sound could travel a great distance!

"It's all right!" said Columb with a laugh, starting to run again. "Cathal Cassidy's not on the road yet, and I

hope Micky gets hold iv him and turns him back be the fut iv Binbawn. He would call me old Columb, the rip, and I could buy him, body and soul!

"Buy him body and soul!" he repeated several times in succession. "They can call me old, but I've the money, the hard money, and that's more than some iv them have, than most iv them have if it goes to that! They'll not cross me! They're fecard iv me!"

He slowed down and came to a halt as he saw a light gleam in the valley below at the Crinnan cross-roads. It was the lamp burning in his home, and there, sitting beside the fire, was Maureen O'Malley, waiting for Cathal Cassidy and his cart to come. Probably she was asleep now. As he thought of this a strange sensation filled his breast, and something rose in his throat as if choking him. He could hardly breathe, but despite this a wild feeling of joy welled up in his being, causing his feet to lighten, his heart to stand still. Time seemed to cease for a moment; the world stood suspended. In front of his eyes hovered a blue light, a halo in the center of which was a face, the face of Maureen O'Malley. But almost as soon as he saw it the picture faded away and melted into the background of the hills.

"Columb's mad!" he said, without moving, for he wanted to recapture the vision again. "You big gawmy iv a fool, Columb, ye're mad!" He did not speak of himself as old Columb now. He suddenly felt very young, as if a new increase of young, warm, pulsating blood filled his veins. The light of his home in the hollow of the hills seemed to burn a pale blue, a color which he had never noticed in the light before.

He walked towards it hurriedly for a distance, but as he drew nearer his step became slower and slower. He walked with shoulders squared and head straight as if wanting somebody near at hand to notice his fine appearance, his youthful gait, his superiority. In fact he was ready to dare anything now, but still he walked slowly, as if afraid. This sudden feeling of timidity annoyed him. Never before in

all his life had he known such a feeling. Never before, and he was a man well on in years, not so far on, but still so far that he knew what he was about. Not as young as some of the fellows, he would admit, but for all that not so old. And then he was stronger than most, supple as an eel, and in addition he had the money. If he had not a good suit on his back he could buy one, aye, half-a-dozen suits of the best cloth going, and then not miss the few pence that they cost him.

When he came near the window he moved slowly, very slowly, taking care to make as little noise as possible. He came within six paces of the window, then stopped as if lacking power to go any further.

"I'm a fool," he said in a whisper as if goading himself to further progress. Then with a manly effort he conquered his hesitation, approached the window, leant on the sill and looked in, his grubby jaw pressed against the pane, his heart palpitating as if it would burst.

Maureen O'Malley was inside. She sat by the fire on the only chair which the single-roomed cabin contained. Her head was bent down as if she were looking into the flames, her eyes hidden by the stray tresses that hung over her brows, the lower portion of her face sunk in shadow.

Round her shoulders was a shawl, the lower tassels of which rested on her knees. Under the shawl appeared a dark brown woolen skirt, raised ever so slightly and disclosing to view a pair of boots, a little splashed with mud, but oh! so small.

"She has the weest feet in the world," Columb whispered. "Just the kind that Kathleen Malley had when she went to the dances years gone."

He straightened himself with a start as the girl raised her head. Stepping back, he squared his shoulders as if on the point of attempting some hazardous feat.

"Ye would think that it wasn't me own house at all," he muttered savagely. "And me afeeard to go in."

He straightened his coat, sorted the neck of his shirt, went to the door, which was open, and stepped inside.

IV

"Is it yerself that I see, Maureen Malley?" he asked, holding out his hand to the girl. He felt strangely excited and happy as she caught his hand and said: "It's yerself at last, Columb. I was waitin' till ye'd come in, for it's a lonely spot iv the world up here with nobody at all. How is it that ye can live here all on yer lone?"

"People must live somewhere," said Columb with a rough sigh. "If they don't live here they have to live somewhere else, and one's as well here."

"Without a neighbor or any one to know how ye are!" said the girl, drawing her hand away. "If the sickness came on ye here, what would ye do at all?"

"Die as likely as not," said Columb with a shrug of bravado. "One might as well die here as down at Meenaroodagh, for it's all the same to the grave-digger."

"But without a priest to put the Holy Oil on ye and ye goin' out iv the world," said Maureen, her face assuming an expression of pity. Then in a lighter tone and smiling, "Iv course, ye don't mean what ye say, Columb."

"Well, we'll leave it at that," said the man, implying by his tone that it didn't really matter whether his remark was believed or not. "Now, tell me," he went on, as he threw half a dozen turf on the fire, "was it to the Doon Well that ye went the day, Maureen?"

"That it was," said the girl, in a low and serious voice. "I went there in the morn."

"Well, I didn't see ye passin'," said Columb. "Was it this way that ye came?"

"Round here," said the girl. "But it was so early that nobody was up at all on the first part iv the journey."

"And weren't ye feeard?"

"Not a bit," said the girl. "As long as it was dark I kept sayin' me Rosary, and that kept me from thinkin'. 'Twas lonely enough here under the black iv the hills and the sounds that was in it iv things flyin' and screechin'

and makin' a noise like ghosts, and maybe them only moorhens or weasels for all I knew."

"They do make a noise at night," said Columb, sitting on a heap of bags by the corner of the wall and taking a pipe from his pocket. "They do make a noise be night, and dark nights more than any other, when ye can't see them. Now if I'd seen ye on the road, Maureen Malley, I'd keep ye company on the journey till the break iv mornin'."

He took a spale from the hob, lit it and put it to his pipe. He felt very much at his ease now.

"But ye weren't up at that hour, Columb," said the girl. " 'Twas about three o'clock in the mornin'."

"I wasn't in bed at the time," said the man, with a far-fetched laugh. "I was at work then at me job."

" 'Twas early enough to be on any job," said the girl. "Was it the job?"

" 'Twas that," said Columb, edging his seat near Maureen's chair. He was filled with a sudden desire to tell her everything, his manner of living, his work, the risks he ran, the trials he encountered. "It's a great job," he said. "And it takes a man to grapple with it. None iv them that's down Meenaroodagh would care to face it, I'll warrant. Now, what d'ye think yerself about it? Would any of the raw-bones down there stay up here and live all be themselves just like me? Would they sit up all the night and not know at what minit the polis would come down on them and grab them? Could any iv them go up the awlths be night or come down them and not know when they fall and break their necks? Not one iv them I bate, for they haven't the heart like me. No, they haven't the heart like me, like Columb Ruagh."

He rose to his feet and put his pipe back in his pocket. A strange light in his eyes, drops of perspiration stood on his brow, and the veins on his temple swelled as if they had been inflated by a pump. Maureen O'Malley shrank back affrighted and glanced at the open door through the corner of her eye, mentally debating whether she should run out into the darkness or remain in the cabin.

"I'll bate ye that not one iv them would do it," he said, approaching Maureen and touching her on the shoulder, the forced self-possession and matter-of-fact tone of a few minutes before giving way to a wild outburst of self-glorification. "For why? It's because they haven't the heart in them, the skinny good-for-nothin's. That for them from Columb Ruagh"—he snapped his fingers viciously and hissed through the corner of his mouth. "Here I am and up here in rags, and I could buy them body and soul, any iv them and all iv them! And they wear collars and they wear ties and what not, but now I put it to yerself, Maureen Malley. Can any iv them show a well-lined purse, and if it comes to that, put their shoulders under a load that I can carry? Now I put it to yerself, Maureen Malley; can they do it?"

"No, iv course they cannot, Columb," said the girl, striving to pacify the man. "Old as ye are, ye can do a sight better than many iv them yet."

As she spoke she rose, went to the door and stood there for a moment in the attitude of listening, her hand resting on the door-post. She looked back at Columb and drew her shawl round her shoulders. The cold night air blew round her and into the cabin.

"There's not a noise on the road at all," she said, "and the night's as black as a chimley with no fire in it."

"Then come and sit down here and warm yerself," said the man, touching the turf on the hearth with his boot and sending a shower of sparks flying up against the soot. One caught in the blackness, rested there, merged with the background, and then flared up again. It radiated outwards in tentacles of flame, streaks and streams of fire, every spark glittering like a diamond on a dress of satin.

"Sit down here on the chair and warm yerself," Columb repeated, in a voice which had suddenly become gentle and caressing. "Ye'll be tired after the long journey that ye've had. And pull the door to and put the hasp in it. The night's bitter cold with the wind from the top iv the black hills."

Maureen shut the door, dropping the wooden hasp in its

notch, came back to the fire and sat down. The man looked at her with a kindly, almost tender glance.

"Ye're cold, Maureen," he said softly. "And tired, too. The journey to the Doon Well was too much for them wee feet iv yours." He looked at the boots that now rested in the ashes. "It's the tramp for a man and not for yerself, Maureen."

"It's not the first long tramp that I've had," said the girl. "When I went all the way to Strabane two years gone it was a tramp I'm tellin' ye. It took me many's a hard hour to do it."

"It was far and away too much for them wee feet iv yours," said the man again. Then he rose and gave the fire another kick. As before the body of sparks showered up the chimney, though a few spurted outwards and fell on the hearth and died away.

"I'll make ye a drop iv tay," he said. "There's a tay-pot in the corner and a kettle."

"No tay, Columb, thank ye all the same," said the girl.

"Or a wee drop iv potheen," said the man. "I've it here, lots iv it in a jar. It'll keep ye from goin' to sleep and put heart into ye."

"I've never put it to me lips," said Maureen. "It's the Bishop's pledge that I have, and it's not up for over a year yet. It won't be long now till Cathal Cassidy and his cart comes by. He should be here at any minit now."

As she mentioned the name of Cathal, Columb utterly lost his self-control. Anger and spleen distorted his face out of recognition. He rose to his feet, commenced walking to and fro across the room from the fire to the doorway. Several minutes went by while he continued his tramp, muttering something under his breath. Suddenly he stopped and looked at Maureen, his eyes afire, his lips pressed together in a hard thin line.

"So that's what ye are waiting for?" he asked irritably, though from the beginning he knew that the girl was waiting to go home with Cathal Cassidy. "That's what ye're waitin' for here, is it, Maureen Malley?"

"Well, I'm wantin' the ride home, and it's not every

hour iv the day and night that a cart passes this way to Dungarrow," she said in a deep-toned and energetic voice. She smiled. "You didn't think that I was goin' to travel home when there was a chance iv a cart to the very door, did ye now, Columb Ruagh?" she pleaded.

"Iv course not, Maureen, but I can't stand these fellows down there," said Columb, speaking in a harsh whisper and looking Maureen between the eyes. Then as if coming to a certain decision he added: "But, be that as it may, I must foot it up to the hill again and get to my work."

"But it's near bedtime, Columb," said the girl. "Ye're not going out to work at this time, and it's near midnight."

"It's now that I begin my work," said the man resignedly. "I'll get up to Garry Ruddagh and do something. . . . Night's the time for doing the work up at Garry Ruddagh."

There was a moment's silence. Columb Ruagh sat down and slowly drew his black clay pipe from his waistcoat pocket and put it in his mouth. His whole face, the posture of his body, the one leg stretched lazily across the other, the hand fumbling carelessly for tobacco in the pocket of his woolen wrapper, betokened extreme indifference, so apparently extreme after the excitement of a few moments before that it could scarcely be considered real. Doubtless he had formulated a project in his mind, of which the issue was certain.

"Well, I'll stay here and wait for the cart," said the girl. "It'll be sure to come any minit now."

He took a plug of tobacco from his pocket, cut a few slices from it and put the knife and the plug on the floor. Then he looked at the girl.

"Ye wouldn't stay here waitin' in the dark for Cathal Cassidy, would ye, if I took ye round and let ye have a look at what's hid behind the back iv Garry Ruddagh?" said Columb Ruagh, holding the pipe in the fork of his hand while he crumbled the tobacco in his palm. "It's somethin' to show ye, mind, and it's a lot the polis in Stranarachary would give to get their eyes on the same sight. Not one body from here to the heel iv the barony

has ever seen the place be night with the fire lit and the still on the fire. Now, it's not yerself that would mind comin' with me to have a wee sight."

"It's not me that would care a hair if it was be daylight," said the girl, "without it being so black on the brae face. Besides, too, it's near time that Cathal was comin' and him that should be back from the fair iv Kineeragh two hours back or more."

"But it's not him that will be here yet, for more than three hours from now," said Columb Ruagh, spitting from between his teeth into the embers. "It's slack feet that the same Cathal has when it's gettin' away from the fun iv the fair that he bees. He's a divil for fun, the same laddybuck I'm tellin' ye."

"Not more than the other gasairs," said Maureen, slightly nettled. "And if he is itself, it's the way with young blood all the world over."

"It may be, indeed," said the potheen-maker angrily, spitting into the fire again. "It's the way iv the youngsters, as ye say. But they learn sense after a bit, and always when it is too late. Look at them now! They take it into their heads to marry and they havin' no more than would buy a basket iv sgiddins to their name."

"But what would that matter if they've strong arms to do a day's work and warm blood in them?" said the girl. "It's better to be married on a man like Cathal and him maybe without a white sixpence than to many's a one with plenty of money."

Columb Ruagh winced and ground his teeth. Being a man past middle-age, the light-hearted assurance of the young girl annoyed him.

"Well, be that as it may," he said, rising to his feet and forgetting to light the full pipe which he held in his mouth, "we'll get out and see all that's to be seen at the back iv Garry Ruddagh. Now, are ye comin' with me, or are ye not?"

"Is it a far step from here?" asked the girl, also getting to her feet and wrapping her shawl round her head.

"Not so far," said the man.

"Can we hear any noise that may be on the road from there?" asked Maureen.

"Iv course we can," said Columb.

"Will Cathal be within earshot if we shout?" Maureen asked.

"Iv course he will," Columb replied. "It's far that a voice can carry on a night like this. Once we get on the top iv Garry Ruddagh and give a shout yer voice can get down to the bottom of the parish. Come away at once, and we'll be there and back in plenty iv time," said Columb, bustling round with unusual animation. He lifted a bottle from the corner, drew the cork and smelt it. Throwing it in the straw piled by the wall, he buttoned his coat, pulled down an ash-plant from the rafters and beat the ground several times as if testing the pliancy of the stick.

"A good bit iv a plant, that," he said. "The mark iv it is on more than the head iv one polisman in Stranarachary. . . . It has stopped some iv them from nosin' round this arm iv the world!"

Maureen looked at the man and crossed herself.

"What's up with ye now?" he asked irritably. "It's a polisman that I hit with it, not yerself. What are ye makin' the sign iv the Cross for? Are ye afeeard iv me?"

He looked into the girl's eyes and a bitter smile showed at the corner of his lips. Maureen smiled uneasily and looked at the ground.

"It's not afraid iv ye that I am," said the girl. "God forbid it."

"Why?" he asked in astonishment.

"Ye are so old," said Maureen. "And ye are a decent man, one that wouldn't do the like iv me any harm."

"Well, I suppose I wouldn't do ye any harm," said Columb with an air of resignation. "But I'm not an old man at all. Forty-two I am, come next Hallowe'en, and a tidy penny by me. That's more than some iv them that I know have. And no end iv land, hill and holm, with plenty iv sheep on it, too."

"I'll wait here for Cathal's cart," said Maureen as if

coming to a sudden decision. "It'll surely not be long afore he comes."

"Well, it's not in me to speak against ye doing what ye like," said Columb with a singularly good-natured look. "Ye can wait for him if ye want to. Everybody to their own way iv doin' things, and I'm not one to prevent them."

He went to the door, looked out into the night, then turned round and gazed at the girl.

"It'll be a bit cold waitin' out here," he said. "And it's a lonely place and all. 'Twas here that Myles Andy Og was killed close on forty years back and him buried outside this very door, God rest him!"

"There was a man killed here?" gasped the girl.

" 'Twas a dirty crime," said Columb. "And him on the way home from the fair iv Kineeragh, with his pockets full iv money. He was set on here, killed and buried, and it was close on three years after that that his body was found. And dyin' without the priest, too! A man that goes like that is never at rest!"

"God be between us and harm, but I've never heard iv it," said the girl, again crossing herself. "But there be so many stories."

"This is a true one," said the man. "It's more than once I've heard steps outside and rappin' on the door when I stayed here me lone at night. It comes every night about twelve o'clock. A week come the morra I was here all me lone and makin' langles for a wether that had a way iv climbin' on the rocks over the brae face. And the darkness that was outside a torch couldn't cut through it. And me sittin' there all on me own, too. All at once there was a sound iv steps outside, quick steps as if somebody was on the run with the fright in his bones. 'Mother iv God! and what will it be at all?' says I to myself, and the cold sweat was out on me forehead. 'It's somethin' that's not iv the world that's in it, surely.' It came to the door whatever it was and began to scrape as if on the grope for the hasp. 'Who are ye?' says I. 'And what is it that ye are wantin'?' But not an answer, only the same

gropin' and scrapin' for the hasp. I went to the winder and up with the blind and looks out. But not a hilt or hair iv anything was to be seen, bar a sheep that was standin' on a knowe forenenst the door. And there was a wind blowin' down from the hills, and the sky was full iv stars just like the night, with a frost over everything. . . . Glory! it's the lonely place that it is here be night and one their lone. But I never stay here at midnight now. I leave the place, hasp the door and get to my work. It's not good for a man or baste to be here with all the dark happenin' iv midnight."

Maureen's face worked convulsively, her eyes quivered nervously and her lips trembled. When Columb ceased speaking, she kept silent and fumbled with the corners of her shawl. Suddenly she closed her lips tightly and looked at the man.

"I'll stay here and wait till Cathal comes," she said coldly. "He'll not be long till he's here now."

"He mayn't be long," said Columb with affected carelessness. "And again it may be a good while. With his poor ranny iv a horse one never can tell what's goin' to happen. And the pull up the Cleena Brae past Binbawn is more than any animal from Cathal's holdin' can do aisy. And then it's not warm for ye to stand out here in the cold on the knowe where Myles Andy Og was murdered."

"But it's inside here that I'll wait," said Maureen anxiously.

"If I could let ye stay in here be the fire I'd be more than glad," said Columb, turning away from the girl and speaking out into the darkness. "It goes against the grain in me to turn ye out, but the door has to be hasped. The polis have their eyes on me, and I don't want them to come in when I'm away. If I'd be in when they came, I'd give them a welcome that they'd not forget. But as it's for me to be out at me work I can't lave the door open for everybody. It's beggars and tinkers and tramps that's often about be night, and they would be comin' in maybe and takin' what's not theirs."

"And is it me to wait out in front iv the house with the ghost iv the dead man, God be between us and harm"—Maureen crossed herself—"walkin' about at the dead iv night?"

"I'd stay here with ye if it was in me power to do that," said Columb in a voice of feigned sympathy. "But honest to God, I can't do it! It's lashin's iv money that has went to the fillin' iv the still, the barley grain, oatmeal and meal seed, and one never knows when the polis will swoop down on it and all yer earnin's go to pot. . . . But I've got to shake me legs now, Maureen. . . . Will ye be comin' with me?"

"Not me," said Maureen icily. "Go be yerself and I'll wait outside in the cold."

"As ye please, Maureen," said the man, standing aside to let the girl pass out. "I would like to let ye have the heat iv the fire, but one never knows when the house is goin' to be searched, Maureen."

The girl moved a few paces away from the door, sat on a heather brough and wrapped her shawl tightly round her shoulders and neck. The night was very cold with a sharp breeze blowing from the hills and the ground beneath her feet frozen hard. Overhead the sky was studded with clear stars which seemed to look down on the bleak country with a taciturn and pitiless stare. All round, the bleak hills of Donegal rose to the sky. Not a sound was to be heard save the plaintive bleating of sheep on the braes, the cry of a belated moorfowl and the noise of some far-off stream falling over the rocks. The house of Columb Ruagh, into which the man had disappeared, was grave-silent.

Presently he came out, however, carrying a bundle under his arm. It was part of the pile of hay which was stored in the cabin. He placed it on the ground at Maureen's feet.

"This is for ye to sit on," he said, looking at the girl. "Just put yer two wee feet in the middle iv the hay, lie in again the knowe and ye'll be as snug as a sparrow in the thatch."

"Thanks to ye," said Maureen in a dry voice, "but it's all right that I am, sittin' here without the hay."

"Ah! if that's the way ye take a kindness ye can plase yerself, indeed," said Columb resentfully. "But I'm tellin' ye that the wait will be a long one, for Cleena Brae between Binbawn and the Bridge is a hard pull and a long one for Cathal's bit iv a baste."

"Well, be it long or short I'll wait, sittin' here on the knowe," said the girl, shrugging her shoulders. "If it's not goin' to let me in and stay be the fire I have nothin' more to say to ye, Columb Ruagh."

"Plase yerself about that, Maureen," said Columb in a surly voice. "If it's yer own wish to stay there I'm not the one to hinder ye. But if ye allow me I'd advise to sit be the other side iv the house. There's more shelter there and it's not as lonesome. Ye're sittin' on the knowe where Myles Andy met his death, this very minute."

"And was this the very place?" asked Maureen in a trembling voice.

"This was the place and no other," said Columb. "He was takin' the near cut across the hills here, and the men that was lookin' for him were in hidin' at the back iv the knowe. He was hit with the supple iv a flail across the head, and he went down like a bullock fallin' in an awlth. And then the men picked him up, skinned him iv all that was on him and buried him."

"How d'ye know so much iv what happened and him killed afore ye were born?" Maureen inquired in a frightened voice. "Ye speak as if ye were here at the very time that the murder was done."

"I wasn't here at the time, but I heard iv it," said Columb. "Things bees done and people speak about them. Maybe it's them that had a hand in the job that told me iv it. It's a lot that a man can hear and him livin' be himself up here on the hills."

"It's much that he hears," said the girl. "And much that's not good. And it's black hearts they have, them that will wait in the dark night and kill a man."

"And a man that's killed and put out iv the world with

never a priest to forgive him and bless him in his last minute cannot rest in his grave at all," said Columb. "It 'ud be better for ye not to sit here at all but come with me up to Garry Ruddagh."

"It's here that I'll stay whatever ye say," said the girl in a low tone, but turning away from the man. "It won't be long till I hear the cart now."

"Maybe not," said Columb, putting his hand over his ear. "Maybe not, but it's far that the sound iv anything will carry on a night like this. It's often in the dark that the sound iv a cart comin' round Binbawn can be heard here, and Binbawn six miles away. But as it is, I can't hear anything now, and the wind coming from Kineeragh."

"It's a cold place living here," said the girl suddenly, turning to the man and looking him between the eyes. "People down in Meenaroodagh bees often speakin' about ye up here, and it's nothin' good that they be sayin' about ye at all."

Columb's eyes glistened and he trembled violently.

"What do they be sayin'?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"Ah! that's it," said the girl. "What do they be sayin'?"

She drew her head closer to the man, speaking in a tragic whisper, and Columb shuddered.

"What d'ye mane?" he muttered. "What is it that ye're drivin' at?"

"Nothin'," said the girl in a calm voice. "Nothin' at all."

"Tell me what ye mane about what they be sayin' down there?" he entreated, placing his face closer to hers and speaking in a whisper.

"Not out here," said Maureen. "Not out in the cold like a beggar at the door, askin' for a bit and sup."

Columb held himself erect and twisted the ash-plant around his shoulders.

"That's what ye're wantin'!" he cried, nosing the hidden purpose. "It's tryin' to keep me here that ye are

after, till the cart comes and ye can get away. I know them capers. . . . Well, I'll lave ye here and get up to Garry Ruddagh. And mind, when I'm gone I offered to take ye with me."

"I'll not forget it, Columb Ruagh," said Maureen. "And God be with ye!"

v

Without another word Columb Ruagh made off and lost himself in the darkness. For a few moments Maureen could hear the sound of his retreating footsteps and felt a certain solace in knowing that some one was near. But after a while the sounds died away and Maureen was left alone with the night. Tucking her feet up under her skirt and reclining on her elbow she mechanically looked along the road to Binbawn. In that direction Cathal Cassidy would come presently. It was now near the hour of midnight, the black hour when Myles Andy Og would rise from his grave and wander over the moor. As the girl thought of the dead man she shuddered and nestled in to the knowe, resting her back against the hob of earth.

"But it was lies that Columb Ruagh was tellin' me," she said. "It's the bad, black heart that the man has, him and his potheen on Garry Ruddagh."

But though the girl had an instinctive dread of Columb Ruagh when in his presence, she felt doubly afraid now that he was gone. Now she was alone. Not a light was to be seen anywhere. If a lamp gleamed, even miles away, it would give her some courage. She would know that people were still awake somewhere, and even that would be company. She pulled her feet further up under her skirts, hid her hands in the folds of her shawl and sunk her head on her breast.

All round her lay the night, menacing and terrible. Here and there at the foot of a bluff or in the fold of a valley the darkness seemed to have massed itself in great patches as if trying to hide some awful tragedy. She

fixed a pair of frightened eyes on the near distance, where objects the most commonplace took on strange shapes. Maureen crossed herself; then she prayed.

But her prayers gave her no solace. A simple "Hail Mary" seemed no protection against the darkness that enveloped her. All about her were the phantoms of night and the moor. She opened her eyes, ceased her prayers, and looked round. Near her a stunted shrub waved in the air, oscillating backwards and forwards as if trying to clutch something which evaded its grasp. Further away where the shadows bulked together as if in conference a black object that looked like a coffin lay on the ground.

Something creaked near at hand as if a step had trod on the frosty heather; a spark rose from the chimney of the cabin and died away in mid air. From somewhere on the left, in the dip of Dungarrow, a dog howled in the darkness, and up on the hills a stray sheep bleated through the night air. Near at hand the darkness seemed to rise upwards in long streaks and take on outlines. These wraiths twisted and turned; their silent profiles advanced towards the girl, only to fade away as they neared her. These were succeeded by others, phantoms fierce and vague that slowly changed their location in space, faded away, reformed, substance without form, inconceivably outlined.

And all the time there was no sound on the road that ran to Binbawn. Cathal Cassidy's cart had not yet reached Cleena Brae.

VI

On leaving Maureen O'Malley, Columb Ruagh walked some two furlongs across the braes. Then he stood for a moment and listened, his hand over his ear. Not a sound was to be heard save that which is always with the night on the moor, the rustling of wild animals, the soft scurry of a rabbit, the sleepy flutter of wings as a moorfowl changed its position in the heather. Columb sat down, drew a match from his pocket, rubbed it along his trousers

and lit his pipe. Away from him, towards the hills that rose higher, was a little gully steeped in shadow. In this something moved and came towards the sitting man. Columb, seeing it coming, took the pipe from his mouth and whistled softly through his teeth. The shadow came to a halt and whistled in reply.

"That yerself, Micky?" Columb called in a sharp whisper.

"It's me," was the answer.

"Come on then, and don't stand there, ye gaby!" Columb called, still in the same sharp whisper, but his voice was charged with impatience.

The figure came nearer. It was the barefooted youth, legs to the neck, who had been despatched on the errand two hours earlier. He stood looking at the man and rubbed his chin with the back of his hand.

"Sit down, ye rip, ye!" said Columb. "Glory be! but ye're a gawny standin' like that! Sit down!"

The youngster sat down, keeping as far away as possible from Columb.

"Come anear me," said the man. "I can't speak to ye and ye as far away as that. Everybody about, and there's more than one on the scringe, will hear me if I've to shout to ye."

The boy edged a little nearer but still stayed beyond reach of Columb's arm.

"It's nearer than that I want ye," said the man angrily. "Am I to be payin' ye wages and ye doin' whatever ye like? Closer yet, ye divil's bastard."

As Columb spoke he reached out, caught Micky by the ear and dragged him close to his side.

"Now tell me all," he hissed, bending over the trembling boy. "Where's the keg? Dropped it down and lost it I'll warrant."

"It's not there where ye said that it was," Micky faltered. "It wasn't there, and it was nowhere else either. I scringed the knowes and all over the brae face at the foot iv Binbawn, but nothin' at all was to be seen."

"God preserve me from ever havin' a plaisham like yer-

self again!" said Columb angrily. "The directions was aisy and simple. A wain iv two wouldn't go astray on the wee job that I set ye out to do. That's what comes iv havin' a workhouse brat to do the work. . . . And maybe it was the polis that ye met as well and told them everything."

"Not a hilt or hair iv any polisman did I see at all," said Micky, squirming as Columb tightened his hold on the imprisoned ear. "Not a hilt or hair iv any one like that."

"What did ye see then? Was it ghosts?"

"Didn't see any ghosts, neither," said Micky. "I was runnin' too quick to see anything."

"That's the reason then that ye didn't put yer eyes on the wee cask at the foot iv Binbawn," said Columb in a harsh voice, twisting the poor creature's ear in a vigorous squeeze.

"Let me go, Columb Ruagh!" Micky yelled. "It's pullin' the ear off iv me that ye are!"

Columb loosened his grip, started to his feet and looked round while the youngster bent himself to the ground both hands on the sore ear and began sobbing.

"Now it's not for the likes iv you to begin blabberin' like that, gasair," said the man in a vindictive voice, going down on one knee and bending over the shuddering creature. "Ye're a big man and ye should try and carry yerself like a man."

"Ye almost pulled the ear off iv me," howled the boy. "I couldn't see the cask at all and I looked round me everywhere in the dark. And it's as black as soot there with not a soul in sight."

"Then ye didn't see anybody at all?" asked Columb in a startled voice.

"Nobody at the foot iv Binbawn," said the youngster, catching his breath at every word. It seemed as if he might shriek at any moment.

"Now go aisy," said Columb, again looking round and putting his hand over his ear. "Tell me everything and go aisy. There's a white shillin' for ye if ye go aisy and tell me everything."

Columb jingled a number of loose coins in his trousers pocket as he spoke.

"It was runnin' all the time that I was till I came to Binbawn," said the youngster. "Then I had a look round, but sorra a sight could I get at all iv the wee keg. There was nothin' there, only three sheep and them gruntin' to themselves under the shelter iv a hobeen. Made me afeeard at first when I didn't see them and them gruntin' to themselves. I said me prayers and went round the hobeen and then I saw the sheep, two wethers and one ewe, and them belongin' to Liam Logan iv Meenaroodagh. It's lost that they were, and them runnin' about the mountains a month come the morrow night. It's from the fair iv Kineeragh that Liam was drivin' them when he lost them, and him tight. And they've ribbigs on their backs and thonags and branded on the horn. And when—"

"The curses iv hell on them sheep," said Columb impatiently. "What did ye do then?"

"I was goin' round lookin' for the keg when I hears the noise iv a cart on the road from Kineeragh, and then I thought iv the Bridge iv Cleena and it down and broke," said Micky. "And down the brae I scooted as fast as I could leg it. It's out on the road I went, when I thought iv what I was tould about not lettin' anywan know who I was and what was takin' me out in the dead iv night to the fut iv Binbawn with not a soul at all near by. I got to the road, then I thought about the bridge fallin' and says I to meself, 'How am I to tell a man that the bridge is down and not tell him how I know it, and as well not tell him who told me iv it and not let him know who I was.' 'Twas a puzzle I'm tellin' ye, Columb Ruagh. I thought and thought and there the cart comin' rumblin' along and gettin' near by every minit. And it was feeard that I was, and me puzzlin' in me head what it was that I was to say to him that was drivin' the cart."

"Come on and spit it out, ye rip," said Columb in a threatening voice. "What was in yer mind at the time is no consarn iv any one. What did ye do and what did ye say? That's what I want to know."

"The cart came anear me, and I could see him that was drivin', sittin' in front with a bit iv a bag round his head because iv the cowld and the air from the hills," Micky continued. "And he had his pipe in his mouth and his whip was lyin' across the front board and him givin' a bit iv a lilt to keep himself company. All at once he saw me standin' on the brough iv the road and says he, 'Who are ye, at all?'

"I knew him by his talk; Cathal Cassidy from down the country in the townland iv Meenaroodagh. It's more than many's the time I saw him sellin' sheep at the fair iv Stranarachary."

"Not much stock that comes off of his holdin'," muttered Columb. "Go'n with what ye're sayin'."

" 'It's Condy Paddy Og iv Dooran that I am,' I said, letting on to him that that was me name, for Cathal Cassidy doesn't know me be sight, not in the black night anyway!

" 'Well,' says he, 'it's a funny place, this, to find ye at this hour iv the night. Where would ye be goin'?'

" 'Home,' says myself. 'I was at the Doon Well. 'Twas with me mother that I was, and she was comin' home on a car and me sittin' on the dickie. 'Twas Hudy Nelis's car, and me mother was taken bad and got a car to drive her home. We just came as far as Cleena Bridge when we saw that the bridge had fell down and the car couldn't get across. Then it was up to us to do somethin', and the driver says to me, says he, 'Ye long-legged plaisham, ye can foot it, and get home and tell them that the bridge is down and yer mother who's not able to walk like yerself can come back with me as far as the house iv Neddy Condy out at the foot iv Aughla and stay there for the night. Then on the morra she can make home be herself and maybe get a lift on the carts that bees goin' to Kineeragh, or maybe the mail-car. So it's on me way home that I am now,' I says.

" 'And the Bridge is down?' says Cathal Cassidy.

" ' 'Tis then,' I told him.

" 'Well,' says he, 'it's a lucky job meetin' yerself and

savin' six miles iv the journey, three there and three back to here. When had ye somethin' to ate last?' he asked me.

" 'Nothin' crossed me mouth since I left the Doon Well,' says I.

" 'Then get this into ye,' he says, and from the cart he got out a big slice iv bread and butther and gives it to me. Currant bread it was, too. 'And this,' says he, and puttin' his hand in his pocket he gives me a white shillin'.' "

As he said this Micky pulled the shilling from his pocket and held it up between finger and thumb. Columb reached out quietly, caught the boy's wrist, took the shilling and put it in his own pocket.

" 'Twas given to me," Micky protested. "Cathal Cassidy gave it to me for me own self."

"Iv course he did," said Columb in an angry whisper. "It's like some iv them down-the-country men to throw their shillin's about and maybe not havin' another penny in the world. Full iv pride and consate they are, the rips iv the divil. But what d'ye want with a shillin'? I'd like to know that. Ye get what I give to ye and no more, mind. When I was yer age I never saw the color iv a penny, let alone a shillin'. And the lies that ye told Cathal Cassidy. Goigah, I've never thought it iv ye! And what came after ye got the shillin'?" Columb inquired.

"Are ye goin' to keep it like that?" asked Micky, looking at the white coin which his master still held between finger and thumb.

"What I'm goin' to do, or what I'm not goin' to do, is no consarn iv yours, and mind that," threatened the man. "What happened then? Spit it out and don't spend the whole night about it."

"Nothin' much after that," said Micky. "Cathal Cassidy turned his cart round and told me to get up on it, for he would give me a lift as far back as Binbawn. But I said no, because it was as quick and quicker for me to leg it over the hills, and I went out on the hills and when I got out iv sight I turned back and here I am. . . . Are ye goin' to give me back me white shillin', Columb Ruagh?"

"Well, if ye're a good boy and not be up to any capers, Micky, I'll give ye the shillin' in the mornin' and maybe add another one to it as well," said Columb in a good-natured tone. "That'll be two white shillin's for ye, Micky rascal, great liar that ye are. And if ye go on like that, getting shillin's for nothin', ye'll soon have yer fortune made and have more money in hand than the richest man in all Ireland. Now how would ye like that, Micky, me boy?"

Micky, dreading this bantering tone and fearing that something bad was about to take place, shrunk into himself. He felt that he did not want the two shillings. In fact, he was ready to forsake any further claim to the shilling which Columb had taken from him a minute ago. All that the boy, whose long crooked legs were sore after the race across the hills, now wanted was to get to bed. He gave no answer to the man's question.

"Are ye wantin' the two shillin', or are ye not?" asked Columb when he waited a moment for the boy to speak. There was still no answer, for Micky, knowing that his master would forget all about the promise in the morning, kept silent.

"Well, if ye're not goin' to trust me," said the man, guessing the thoughts in the boy's head, "I'll give ye the two shillin's now." He rattled some coins in his pockets, then stretched out his hand towards the youngster, and two white pieces glittered on his palm like a pair of eyes.

"I don't want them," said Micky.

"Don't want them!" Columb gasped. "What's that for? Take them!"

"I'll not, then, till I know what's to be done after I get them," said the youth.

"There's nothin' to be done at all," said the master.

"Can I go down to the house below then and get into bed?" Micky asked. "If that's what can be done I'll take the two shillin's and scoot down the hill at once, Columb Ruagh."

The man with an angry snort threw the money on the

ground, near Micky, then got to his feet and stepped back a pace.

"There!" he said. "There's the money and all for yerself, for when ye have it I can't take it from ye again. Put it into your pocket at once, at once, and listen to what I've to say."

The youngster also got to his feet but did not touch the money.

"Lift it up, now," said Columb in a whisper. "It's all yer own, and think iv what ye can get for it at the fair iv Stranarachary next comin', sweets and apples and gingerbread."

"I don't want sweets and apples and gingerbread," mumbled Micky. "I want to get to the house below and into bed."

"And a woman there and the bed beside the fire!" said Columb in a shocked tone. "Ye can't go into bed with a woman there, and ye such a big man. Can ye now?"

"Well, I'll sleep be the fire with my clothes on."

"That ye won't this night," said Columb. "So it doesn't matter whether ye take the two shillin's or not! What I want ye to do is this and nothin' else till mornin'. Get up there to Garry Ruddagh and inside the cave with ye where there's a snug fire on in undher the still and keep yer eye on it and light it up if it's goin' out. Just make it up once and put the biggest bucket in the place under the worm, and then ye can lie down and get to sleep and waken up whenever ye like. And take the two shillin's with ye and mind the grand day that ye'll have when the next fair comes round in the town below."

"And ye yerself's comin' with me, Columb Ruagh, aren't ye?" whimpered the boy.

"I would if I could," said Columb. "But what with one thing and another I can't go up there for a while yet. Ye just go and I'll come up as soon as I can. Maybe I'll be up afore ye, too, for I can climb up the rocks like a two-year-old."

"But the cave is that lonesome that if I go up there and

sit down all on me lone I'd be stone dead in the morn," said the boy, a shudder shaking his frame. "It's that black, Columb Ruagh, that ye wouldn't know what's to come out iv the corners and get hold iv ye in it. There are eyes that look out on ye and noises like wild beasts in the black holes."

"But I go up there and work all night on my own, and nothin' ever gets hold iv me," said Columb.

"That's because ye're so big and afeeard iv nothin'," Micky sobbed. "But they'd put me in their pockets and take me away."

"Who'd take ye away?"

"The ghosts."

"But ye've often been up there with me and ye've never seen anything more ugly than yerself," said the man. "Have ye now?"

"I could see and hear them," said the youngster. "Eyes lookin' in out iv the blackness and sounds iv things moving and steps in the corners and now and again grunts and coughs and hiccups the same as if one was gettin' choked dead. It's a wild place up in the cave in the day, let alone in the black iv night."

"Oh, ye're a fool, ye damned plaisham!" said Columb Ruagh, irritably making a step towards the boy. The youngster ran off a couple of paces then stopped.

"Off with ye!" roared Columb, a wild rage overmastering him. "Up to Garry Ruddagh and stay there till morning. Don't let me see ye down here till then, mind ye. If I do I'll skin ye alive. Off with ye! Scoot!"

He ran at the youngster, who disappeared into the darkness sobbing. Columb stopped and listened to the sobs as they gradually became fainter and fainter. From the sounds that reached his ears he could judge that Micky was taking to the hills. In a few minutes he was out of sight, then out of hearing.

Columb Ruagh went back, his eyes fixed on the ground. Suddenly he saw the two shillings on the ground. Bending down, he lifted them and put them in his pocket. Then, buttoning his coat, he ran down the hill towards the

house below. What he was going to do when he got to the house he did not know. He had no idea in his mind, no plan. Why had he sent the boy, Micky, to the cave? He was not certain now, but a moment ago he had some hazy idea that it would be wise to get the youngster out of the way. But why did he want the youngster out of the way? He could not say.

He stopped and looked around. The hill was deserted. Not a sound save that of a brook sobbing wearily by his side as it made its way down to the hollows, and the lone sough of the winds as they dreed over the heather, moaning as if tired. Below him he could see the house, looking strangely white in the night. As he gazed at it he reflected that a whitewash-brush had not touched it for close on twenty years, not since it came into his possession anyway. Never before had it appeared so white to the man. And somewhere near it Maureen O'Malley was sitting on the bundle of hay waiting for Cathal Cassidy.

As he looked at the house and thought of the girl he grew calm and regained possession of his clearness of mind. He had chased the boy Micky away because he did not want him in his company when he spoke to Maureen O'Malley again. He wanted the girl to himself, the proud, conceited Maureen! And what she had to be proud about he could not realize. She should be gratified that Columb Keeran, a man like him, with money and land, spoke to her.

Meanwhile as he stood there he heard a strange and singular sound as if somebody was sobbing at the house below. He heard it distinctly, though feebly, as if some one overcome with grief was doing the utmost to stifle an emotion. Was it Maureen? The girl, no doubt; frightened as she thought of the ghost of murdered Myles Andy Og. Probably she even saw the ghost, her mind giving way to terror in the darkness.

As he thought of this he experienced a strange and unhealthy feeling of hatred towards the girl. She was frightened, but what else did she deserve! She was so proud and conceited that it would do her a world of good if she

experienced terror and fright. It would bring her to her senses and show her that she could not always ride the high horse. How fear would bring this about Columb did not know, but he felt that it would and took pleasure in the thought.

He sank slowly to the ground, resting his head in a bed of wild iris. For a moment he looked at one of the sword-shaped leaves, then pulled it and placed it between his thumbs. Bending down he rested his lips on the thumb knuckles and blew against the sharp edge of the leaf. Up from the darkness of the moor a strange sound rose. It mingled with the drear obscurity, at first low and tremulous like the cry of a lost soul, then deeper in tone and louder it rose to the sky. Finally it faltered and died away like a Hope that is lost forever. The lonely moor had found a voice in the night.

"That'll put the fear into her," said Columb with a hoarse laugh. "When I go to her now, she'll be more than glad to see me."

He raised himself up on his hands and knees and looked at the house. Something dark, a shade against the shadow of the wall, was moving from one side to another, now stooping and bending down, then rising and resuming its journey. Against the wall this object appeared limp as a cloth hanging on a peg. When this wraith came to one end of the wall it stopped, stood still for a moment, and then retraced its steps.

As he saw, Columb felt the ground at his knees, picked up a stone, and with a mighty sweep sent it whirling down the brae, his eyes following the line which it traveled. He could see it strike sparks from the stones which it encountered on the first part of its journey, then he could hear its hard clatter as it careered over the hillocks further down. Finally there was a soft splosh as it finished its journey by dropping into a pool at the bottom of the slope.

"There's enough for one night, anyway," said Columb in a whisper. "I'll now get round and come up on the house from in undher."

Twenty minutes later he arrived at the house, to find Maureen standing at the door waiting for him. So it seemed to Columb Ruagh, though down in the deep of his mind the thought that it was not for him but for Cathal Cassidy that she waited gnawed like a worm. But why should he think of this now? Here were the two all alone. The girl was at his mercy, and this thought gave the man a feeling of strength and possession. He had known a feeling almost similar, but not so strong and maddening, when he held the "fingers" as final card in a game of "Twenty-five." There was a touch of malicious exultation in his heart as he gazed at the girl, clinging to the latch of the door as if trying to save herself from falling. Perhaps she was asleep. He came up close to her and touched her on the shoulder.

She roused herself with a start and stared at the man, her eyes wide open and full of fright.

VII

"It's me," he said. "It's Columb. Were ye sleepin'?"

"Columb Ruagh!" she cried. "Oh! I'm so glad that ye've come. I was so feeard with the lights risin' from the hills and the cryin' and squealin' that was in it, up above. Oh, I'm glad that ye've come back here, Columb Ruagh!"

As she spoke she began to sob bitterly, and catching the hands of the old man raised them to her lips. In her isolation and terror she had found something sturdy to cling to, something strong, a protection against the terrors of the night.

"I was so feeard, Columb Ruagh," she went on, kissing his fingers and speaking in phrases that were wildly incoherent. "I was so afeeard, and the dead man out and me lookin' at him and goin' out iv my mind. And I wanted ye to come back, and I walked round the house with me back to it so that nothin' would catch me from behind. And I wanted to run away, and then I thought that they'd be after me down the road and I couldn't move

neither hand or foot. Oh, Columb Ruagh! I'm glad that ye're back with me again. . . . Don't leave me here to meself alone."

The madness seemed to seize the man. Gripping the girl round the waist he drew her in to him. She did not resist. Looking up at him with wild sad eyes, she surrendered mutely, snuggling close to his breast and catching him with both arms, clinging to him as an ivy to a gnarled oak. With a wild sense of mastery and possession he embraced the light, sinuous body, tightening his arms round it as if it would suddenly slip from his grasp and disappear into the breezes of the moor.

"You were frightened, Maureen, were ye?" he articulated, in a hoarse whisper. "Frightened and feeard were ye, Maureen! But ye're safe now, aren't ye? That's right, ye wee girl, ye! That's right! Now ye don't want away, d'ye, away from Columb Ruagh! He'll not let any one do ye any harm at all! Let them try it and they'll see! Wantin' away, are ye? Then off with ye!"

The girl pulled herself from Columb's arm, reeled back to the door and gripped the latch to save herself from falling. For a moment she clung to it, her bosom shaking with sobs. On the ground at her feet lay her shawl which had fallen off when Columb seized her, but as if to replace it her tresses had fallen down and now covered her white neck and heaving shoulders.

"What is it that's wrong with ye?" asked the man, again reaching out his hand and touching her elbow. The girl looked up at him with a puzzled stare.

"Is it yerself that's in it, Columb?" she inquired in a faltering voice.

"Iv coorse it is, Maureen," he replied. "Ye know me, don't ye?"

"I know ye, Columb," she replied. "But I'm so feeard. 'Twas the ghosts first and the bad things on the hills. Then I had a drame, and it means something bad. Oh, an awful drame, Columb! . . . And I'm so cold!"

"Well, then, come in here and sit down and warm yerself be the fire," said the man. "It's maybe out, but I'll

soon get the coals from the greeshaugh and light it up again!"

As he spoke he took a key from his pocket, shoved it in the lock and opened the door. Then he lifted the shawl from the ground and handed it to Maureen.

"Put it round yer shoulders," he said, his voice almost paternal. "And in now with ye to the house and have a warm be the blaze."

He took her arm, escorted her in and placed her on the chair by the fire. A few sparks still glowed in the ashes like wicked red eyes plotting mischief in the darkness. The man groped in the smother for live embers, heaped them in a little pile in the center of the hearth, ground a dry turf between his fingers and placed the mold on the heap. In a few minutes this flared up; turf were piled on the flame, and presently a hearty fire was burning merrily.

"That'll be a fire that'll warm the heart in ye in next to no time," said the man in a voice of exultation as he fixed his eyes on Maureen. The girl sat on the chair, her shawl wrapped tightly round her throat and shivering as if half frozen with cold. Her eyes were fixed questioningly on Columb Ruagh as if some disturbing but indistinct idea concerning him engrossed her mind.

"Ye'll be warm in a minit; just wait till ye see the fire runnin' up against the soot and the sparks jumpin' out on to yer wee boots," said Columb, who was on his feet again, a look of great excitement in his eyes. Putting his hand in his pocket, he felt for something, brought his hand out empty, buttoned his coat, sat down, got up again, sorted the turf on the fire, spat in the flames, unbuttoned his coat, and all the time his eyes were on Maureen, taking stock of her every movement, every expression on her face.

"Was it a dream that I had, Columb Ruagh?" she suddenly asked.

" 'Twas, iv coorse," said the man, sitting down on a heap of bags which stood near the fire and pulling his trousers up at the knees. " 'Twas iv coorse a dream, with the feear iv the hills in yer head and ye hangin' on be the

latch. 'Twas a funny way to get the sleep on ye, Maureen."

"I didn't want to sleep," said the girl. "I was in a maze, and I closed me eyes, and all at once I began to dream. . . . A terrible dream, too."

"Don't trouble about yer dream at all," said Columb irritably. "It's notions that got into yer head, that's what it was. But what am I thinkin' iv, Maureen Malley, havin' ye sittin' here in me home with the light not on. I must light the lamp."

The paraffin lamp hung by a string from the roof-beam. Catching it in his hand, he turned up the wick and lit it. A faint gleam lit the near vicinity, but failed to pierce outwards towards the corners of the room where the shadows lurked in ambush behind every projection of the wall, every nook and corner.

"It's not takin' kindly to it," said Columb, and turned the wick higher up in its carriage. "But that's better, that's better," he muttered as the flame took full purchase of the wick and flared with a brilliant radiance, chasing away the massed battalions of shadows that lurked in the corners of the room. "Now, Maureen Malley, that's better! Draw in be the fire and have a warm to yer shins."

The girl looked uneasily at Columb, and her face showed traces of an uneasy inward agitation. She shivered and moved her chair with submissive haste towards the fire.

"Just sit in and ye'll warm yerself in less than no time," said Columb. "And have a drink iv potheen, the best iv the makin'. There's some here that has been in the house more years than I can tell."

Maureen shook her head.

"More years than I can tell," said Columb, waxing enthusiastic over the age of the liquor. "Never was the like iv it at weddin' or funeral in the barony for twenty years gone. 'Twas buried in a keg in a bog-hole and kept on improvin' with the years, and now there's nothin' like it in all Ireland. And that's sayin' somethin'."

He made his way to the bed in the corner, went down

on his knees and groped in the darkness. When he got to his feet again he held a jar, covered with dry moss from bottom to neck, in his hands.

"Ye can have a drop from this," said Columb in tones of magnanimous self-sacrifice. "And yer lips will be the only ones that ever tasted stuff that's so old and so good."

Again without speaking, Maureen, trembling all over, shook her head.

"It's the cold that ye'll be gettin' if ye don't put some iv this down," cried Columb, putting the jar on the ground and twisting the cork from the neck with his hand. Placing a large delf bowl on the floor, he poured some of the liquor into it.

"Not so much iv it, then, if ye'll have me to take it," said the girl. "It won't be any harm and me so cold, anyway," she went on in a weary voice. "I do feel feeard, and the cold's right in me bones. That'll do, that'll do!"

Columb handed her the potheen. The girl mechanically took the bowl, but her hand trembled so much that the liquor began to splash against the side, and she spilt half of it.

"Put it down, Maureen," said Columb, touching her sympathetically on the shoulder. "Put it down. It's only a wee drop. That's right! That's right! Now are ye warmed up?"

He took the bowl from her hand, placed it on the floor and poured some more potheen into it. Raising it up, he looked at it with the air of a judge, sniffed it.

"Yer health, Maureen Malley," he said and drank. Then in ecstasy he leant back on his seat and closed both eyes with a satisfied air. When he opened them again his glance rested on Maureen.

The girl was now apparently asleep, one little red hand resting on the other, her shawl thrust back from her shoulders, her throat gleaming white against the background of her hair. Columb, as he watched, could see her bosom rise and fall, the flush of color redden her cheeks and die away again. As he looked at her and took in every line of her

form, the contour of her cheeks, the rounded fullness of her breast, she moved her head ever so slightly. Her eyelashes quivered and a smile showed on her face.

Columb Ruagh got to his feet, went down on his knees in front of the girl, rested his hands on her shoulders and looked in her face, his lips close to hers. How smooth and pink her cheeks, how small her hands, how soft her breath! Even as he looked at her he raised his own big, miry hands and rubbed his chin where the beard, unshaven for many days, stood out in bristles like the teeth of a currycomb.

"Are ye sleepin', Maureen?" he asked, and there was no answer.

"Ah! it's no wonder that they'll have nothin' to do with me, but wait!" he muttered, as he drew his calloused fingers across his chin again. "But just wait!"

His head full of conflicting thoughts, he got to his feet again, ransacked a bowl in the chimney brace and from the dust brought out a varied assortment of articles, a fragment of glass which once formed part of a mirror, a cake of soap, last used when he washed his face for church two Sundays before, a razor and a tin can. Filling the tin with water, he placed it on the fire, took off his coat, thrust his shirt sleeves up to the elbow and began stropping the razor on his forearm.

After a few minutes he took the can of water from the fire, tested it with his finger, then dropped the soap in it. Having no brush, he lathered his face with his hands, soaping cheeks and jaw, and watching in the little glass which he had installed in a niche of the chimney brace, the soap foam thicken and overspread the razor-ground of his ruvid features. Then he shaved, his hand trembling a little as he did so and his eyes from time to time turning round to the chair on which Maureen was seated.

Having finished with his face, he smoothed his hair with the palm of his hand and smiled in the mirror, taking alternately front and three-quarters views of his face.

"It doesn't matter about the rest iv me," he said. "I've the shoulders iv a man and the suppleness iv a hare, and

I never show it in runnin' away like some iv them. Cathal Cassidy, indeed, the rip!" he exclaimed in a hoarse voice, charged with passion. "I'll show him!"

He lifted his wrapper from the ground, put it on, but as he was on the point of buttoning it he recollected that when he was younger and as big a fool as the rest of them down the country, he used to take part in the games of his fellows, jumping, running and tug of war. Once, when engaged in the latter pastime, Father Dan, who happened to be one of the onlookers, gazed at Columb, who stood ready for the contest, head uncovered, arms bare to the elbows, the collar of his shirt opened and his muscled breast bare. "What a splendid-looking boy," said Father Dan. "He's like an ancient god!"

Columb did not know rightly what an ancient god was, but judging from the tone of the priest that a compliment was intended, he appeared at all games for years afterwards in the same dress. Now that there was another game on, the game of love, why not enter the field in the same manner? Columb took his coat off again, thrust up his sleeves and turned down the collar of his red shirt. He looked into the mirror, took stock of his neck and the blue jugular vein that stood out like a rubber tire, the set of his jaw and nose, front view and profile.

"It'll do, it'll do," he chuckled. "There's life in the old dog yet, and with the money behind ye'll go far to get better."

Again he knelt on the ground in front of Maureen, who was sleeping soundly, and put his hands on her knees. All at once the girl, though asleep, had that indefinable impression, felt but not seen, of something foreign in the atmosphere, something that threatened her safety. She awoke with a start and her eyes, wide open, rested on the man. She stared at him for a second, then seized his hands and thrust them away from her.

"What are ye doin', Columb Ruagh?" she cried. "Is this the way that ye're tryin' to thrate me?"

"But I'm doin' nothin' to ye, Maureen Malley," said the man, springing to his feet. A look of annoyance and

confusion showed on his face. "I'm doin' nothin' to ye. I could have done whatever I liked because ye were asleep, but I didn't, Maureen Malley! It's the potheen that's made ye so bad and cross, Maureen."

"Maybe that," said the girl, rubbing her eyes. "But it was yerself that gave it to me, Columb Ruagh. And ye look so funny, too, Columb, with all the hair off yer face like a young fellow at chapel on a Sunday, and them goin' to their duties. But it's a funny sight that ye are, Columb, and yer face so red and so funny, so very, very funny!"

She lay back on the chair and burst into a fit of laughter as she fixed her eyes on the man, who now, looking confused and foolish, stared at the girl, his mouth open a little and his arms, bare to the elbow, hanging limp by his sides.

"What are ye goin' to do, Columb?" chuckled the girl. "Is it to kill a pig with the way yer shirt is turned down be the neck and yer sleeves thrust up? Ye look so funny that one wouldn't think that it was yerself that was in it at all. And the razor with the soap on it. Was it shavin' yerself that ye were, and the sleep on me?"

As she spoke she pointed at the razor, which was now lying on the bags, still open, with the lather on the steel. Then she burst into another hysterical fit of laughter.

"What were ye shavin' yerself for?" she inquired. "At this hour iv the night and no fair to go to the morrow? Come, tell me what were ye shavin' yerself for? Tell me, Columb Ruagh?"

She got to her feet, tried to steady herself, swayed and fell on the chair again.

"It's the potheen that's got to me head," she laughed. "And it the first time, too. It's bad that it will bring me; I'm sure iv it. But, Columb," she pleaded, "tell me what ye shaved yerself for? I never saw ye look so clean and tidy in all me life."

The man looked vacantly at the girl for a moment, rubbing his eyes, as if he and not Maureen had just awoke from sleep. Thus for a moment. Then he seemed to come

to a decision. Kneeling down, he caught both the girl's hands, raised them to his lips and kissed them.

"Maureen, my wee Maureen," he mumbled, placing his head on her hands and holding them so tightly that she could not pull them away. "I shaved, I tidied meself, because, Maureen, I want ye! I want ye to be my wife! Maureen, I've the money and maybe I'm old as they say, but that and all I've shoulders as strong as the best iv them. I want ye, Maureen. It's long and many's a day since ye came into me mind, and I've been savin' and scrapin' the money, puttin' a bit by one day and a bit by another day, and, Maureen, it was all for yerself. Ye'll be mine, won't ye? Say that ye will. Let me kiss ye; let me hold ye! It doesn't matter who they are, I'll not let them put a hand on ye! I'll work me fingers to the bone for ye. Maureen, my wee Maureen! I'll put boots and dresses on ye the best in all Ireland. And now, it's not wantin' to get away that ye are, Maureen?"

VIII

The girl had risen to her feet and was doing her best to free her hand from the madman. She was now terribly frightened. Added to fear was her weariness. She had been out of bed for some twenty-four hours, had been traveling most of that time on the rugged mountainy roads. During this time she had eaten very little. She had some tea, bread and butter when she left home in the morning, a similar repast at the Doon Well, in a peasant cottage, and since then nothing.

Then, when her vitality had reached its lowest ebb, when with muscles strained, nerves weary, she reached the Crinnan cross-roads and sought for a moment's rest in Columb's house, she was turned out into the darkness and cold, and left there a prey to the weirdest fancies of her susceptible imagination. The sup of potheen taken almost blindly had cheered her for a moment and soothed her nerves. From this she woke up to the further infliction of Columb Ruagh's attentions.

"Leave me be, Columb Ruagh," she pleaded, still trying to free her hand. But in this she was unsuccessful. Holding both her hands in one of his, he put his arm round her white, supple neck and pressed her back into the chair, every futile effort on her part to free herself seeming to add fire and strength to the man's passion. She sank into the chair and gazed up at him with terror-stricken eyes, afraid to move even a finger now lest the slightest motion would bring her to a fearsome and horrible end.

"Now," said the man, gripping both her arms in a grip of iron. "Now, what have ye to say? Ye don't want me, don't ye? And amn't I as good as the best of them? Amn't I? Amn't I? Amn't I?"

There was no reply. The girl's eyes suddenly closed and a ghastly pallor overspread her countenance. Columb Ruagh was startled, then scared. He put his hand to his ear as if listening for sounds from the outside, then he bent down over the girl.

"Maureen Malley!" he whispered. "Maureen Malley!"

There was no answer, not a quiver of an eyelid. Columb shuddered.

"God!" he stammered. "I've killed the girsha! What's wrong? What's wrong with her? Maureen Malley. Wee Maureen!"

He looked at her again, taking stock of her face as she lay there limp and motionless, her eyes closed and cheeks colorless. Her face had the pallor of death.

"But ye're not dead, Maureen!" said the man thickly. "It's only makin' fun iv me that ye are, makin' fun iv old Columb that never meant ye any harm. Waken up! Waken up! Waken up!"

He caught her arm, lifted it and felt the pulse with his thumb. Under the skin he felt the slow throb of blood in motion.

"That's right, girsha, that's right," he laughed. "Just a drop iv water on yer face, and it'll bring ye to yer senses. Tryin' to frighten Columb were ye, ye rascal?" he demanded, shaking his fist in mock anger at the girl. "But he wasn't to be caught in that way. No fear! Ye'll not

catch Columb like that! There's more in his head than a comb can take out. Just a drop of water and the job is done, or a drop iv potheen! Potheen's better!''

He poured a drop from the jar into the bowl and held it to her mouth, spilling a portion of the liquid over her lips. Maureen gasped, then swallowed. Her eyes opened and she sat up.

''Was I sleepin' again, Columb Ruagh?'' she asked in a terrified whisper.

Columb seized both her hands in his, raised one of them almost to his lips and dropped it again.

''It's the fear that ye've put in me, Maureen Malley,'' he said. ''You fell in a sort iv faint, and I thought that ye were dead.''

She looked at him, then gazed round the room, at the fire first, then at the lamp swinging from the roof.

''I must go, Columb,'' she said in a tone of decision, drawing her hand away and tightening the shawl round her shoulders. ''It must be close on the mornin', and not a cart comin'. I shouldn't have waited at all here. Keepin' ye from yer sleep and frightenin' them that's waitin' for me down in Meenaroodagh.''

''But don't go and the light iv day so near now,'' Columb entreated in a thick voice. ''Stay where ye are, and when it's light I'll leave ye at home. I don't see what ye're thinkin' iv waitin' for that cart and the man that's drivin' it, havin' no thought iv ye at all, but up to capers iv his own and after fun iv his own, for that's the way with the most iv them fellows down the country. Spendin' what few ha'pence they have they are, then it's talkin' iv marryin' and makin' love that they're to. But a man like me, Maureen, that never says anything about what I have, has more money than them all put together. Take the whole pack iv them and I could buy them body and soul! That's what Columb Ruagh could do! That's what I could do! For look, Maureen Malley, look and see this.''

As he spoke he stood on the bags, and reaching up grasped a pick which was stuck in the roof under the rafters. With this he began digging furiously at the floor,

picking up the flags embedded in the spread of dank earth.

"Down!" he roared. "Down yet, Columb Ruagh, and show them! Down!" he gasped, raising the pick over his head with a mighty swoop and bringing it floorward with such force that it raised sparks from the stones and scattered clods of earth all over the room, even as far as the doorway. "Down yet! Into it, Columb Ruagh!" he yelled, foaming at the mouth and putting all the force of his body into the labor.

Something gave back a hollow sound. "That's it," he grunted, spitting on the disturbed pile which his pick had torn up. "Now, Columb Ruagh will let them see what's to be seen here at the Crinnan cross-roads! Now ye'll let them see, whoever they are! An old dog for the hard road and a pup for the level! That's it. In inundher it! Up with it! Up with it! That's the way, me boy! That's the way! Let them see what it is! Let them see!"

Maureen, as if in a dream, watched the whole scene enacted in front of her, saw Columb Ruagh in the light of the lonely cabin struggling with his pick, tearing the very bowels from the floor. Over his head, as if moved by the tremendous vitality of the man, the lamp swung backwards and forwards, keeping time with his labors. It swung down so that the man's shadow was thrown on the further wall; up, and the beads of perspiration on his tanned face were lit like jewels on brown satin; it swung back as if keeping out of the way of the sharp-edged pick, and forward shedding its light on the labor-polished steel.

But unequally distributed, the two lights, fire and lamp, while throwing the man into such prominent relief, hardly illumined the corner recesses of the room. Here a thousand fantastic effects were produced, picturesque and weird. A creel, a basket outlined so faintly, might have been taken for phantoms of a disordered mind; the moist streak on the wall where water ran in the wet weather gleamed with the borrowed light like a bar of polished gold. Here and there, where the damp oozed through the wall, the stones reflected facets of light that were mischievous eyes staring from the blackness. The clatter of the striking

pick, the grunts of the man, echoed from every corner; and the whole cabin was instinct with life, but life so grotesque and fantastic that Maureen shuddered.

"This is it!" yelled the man. "Here, Maureen Malley. Come and look at it! See what Columb Ruagh has in his keepin' and all for yourself!"

As he spoke he threw down his pick, went on his knees by the hole newly made, and dragged therefrom a large, rusty iron box.

"This is it!" he yelled, "this is it!" and lifting the pick again he crashed it through the lid. "This is it, Maureen Malley!" he shouted, raising the box in his arms, coming over to the girl and emptying its contents on the floor at her feet. From the box fell a shower of coins, gold and silver; sovereigns, crowns, and florins. They fell at her boots, rolled across the floor, under the bed, into the fire, making themselves beds in the ashes.

"There, there, it's running away from me!" he yelled, as if an overmastering passion had suddenly reasserted its sway, and, rushing to the fireplace, he groped amidst the cinders for the gold which had rolled that way. "It went here, a yellow boy," he said, taking a red-hot coal in his hand and looking beneath it. "And in these ruts anything can be lost," he screamed, running his fingers through a groove in the hearth and tearing out the ash which filled it. "No, it's gone, it's lost," he groaned. "Where is it, the one that fell here? I saw it run into the ashes. It's hard to get, but it goes easy. Did ye see it, Maureen Malley? Did ye see it?"

He suddenly realized that he was talking to the girl, that she was watching him, and he stood upright, his shirt open down the front, exposing the red hairs which, knotted and twisted, lined his massive chest.

"That'll do!" he said in a voice of self-reproof, as if suddenly regaining control of himself. "That'll do! Ye're goin' off yer head, that's what ye're doin'. A guinea less or more and what does it matter? There's enough and to spare left. So enough iv it," he said, and a ghastly expression showed on his face. "Enough iv it! It's all for

yerself, Maureen, every penny and every piece. I don't want it any more! It's all saved for yerself, Maureen. Take it, take it!"

He bent, lifted a handful of gold and placed it in the girl's lap. She thrust it away, and, terror-stricken, she rose to her feet.

"I must go home," she said in a strangled whisper, fixing a vacant, horrified stare on the man, while thoughts danced in her mind like feathers in a whirlwind. To make her way out and go home seemed simple and conclusive enough, but at the same moment a premonition of something horrible and hideous which was about to take place filled her mind. In a maze she could hear the last coin, which had fallen from her apron, finish its roll on the floor. At the same moment a pair of cruel red eyes afire with brutish rage looked into hers, and a shower of gold again fell into her lap. The hands that dropped the gold seized hers. She was lifted in the air, almost to the swinging lamp, then felt herself laid down again on the bed in the corner.

"Columb Ruagh, is it goin' to kill me that ye are?" she screamed. "Let me go! Oh, Mother iv God!"

IX

At eight o'clock in the evening Cathal Cassidy, the business of the day completed, took his way homewards from the village of Kineeragh. The cart rumbled out from the streets and their lines of houses into the valley that twisted and turned to the foot of Binbawn.

The wooden fences, earthen dykes and sparse hedges which lined the roadway began to crawl by. Here and there stood a few thatched cottages which seemed to have strayed out from the village like chickens from a clutch. Lamps were lit, and through the open door of one house Cathal could see a number of men sitting down, round a table, gambling. An old woman wearing a white frilled cap was stirring a stirabout-pot, and a dog lay on the floor hunting for fleas.

One by one the houses gradually disappeared and Cathal was out on the road, crooked and unfenced, that ran across the moor towards Binbawn and the cross-roads of Crinnan. But it was miles to Crinnan yet. However, the pony knew the road and the little animal had only to go straight on, which it would do, needing neither whip nor rein. Cathal could lie at the bottom of the cart and sleep if he wished to do so. He was sleepy, for he had been out of bed since three o'clock in the morning.

He tied the reins to a breeching-link, shoved a bag of plants near the front board of the cart, stretched out his legs, and rested his head on the bag. Here he could sleep without taking any further heed of the pony, which, knowing the mountain road so well, would be sure to bring the young man to Crinnan cross-roads.

He closed his eyes and thought of Maureen. She would be traveling by foot on the road from the Doon Well by now, her eyes a little tired maybe, but her heart full of thoughts of him. Perhaps even now she had arrived at the cross-roads and was sitting there by the fire waiting.

He thought of the previous night and the time when he clasped her in his arms by the roadside! Her lips so soft against his! Her little fingers pressing his hand just in this manner! With the fingers of one hand he pressed the palm of the other softly, and in dreams he was again in Maureen's company.

He suddenly awoke. It was now close on nine o'clock, and Cathal as he sat up could see the road in front of him stretching upwards towards the hills of Crinnan. On his right was the peak of Binbawn rising coldly and sternly towards the stars. Under him the wheels of the cart gritted the gravel of the roadway.

It was four miles to the summit of Crinnan now, to the cross-roads and Maureen O'Malley. He should have been there by this time, but having so much business to do at Kineeragh Cathal could not get away as early as he intended. But Maureen would wait for him. She would understand.

He was now on the outer lip of the parish, in a district

common to all and owned by none. Here were no houses. The waste was buried in deep, sullen slumber, gloomy and forbidding. In the whole perspective of mute lands there was something not alone dumb but menacing.

Apart from the mysterious sighs of Nature there was not a sound. The stillness and solitude inspired awe. Coming through here at night as he had often done, cut off from the society of his kind, from the wise, year-mellowed words of the old and the heedless laughter of the young, a feeling of fear always settled on the soul of Cathal. In the desert peace of the uplands, with the hard, distant stars glaring pitilessly down, there was something cruel and austere. Death rose from the soundless depths of distance and space and breathed coldly on the man.

Oh, Donegal! of the dark-haired passes and haughty peaks, gloomy, unknown depths and cold heights, what have you to say? Is there a message to be heard in the persistent moan of the wind in your glens, in the disconsolate sea wailing on your surf-bitten shores? Is there something to be learned from the sun-bright luster of Croagh an Airgead, the haughty coldness of Errigal, the drum of the sea on Tory and the white laugh of the waters on the teeth of Gweebarra Bay? Errigal has listened to the thousand light feet on the dancing-floors of Gweedore, but the white bones of the time-forgotten dancers curve and curtsey now in the waters of many a gale that threshes the shores of Tirconail. They were and are not, they are and will not be. And we shall go also. So they chant, the winds in the dark-haired passes, the waves on the sea-bitten shores.

The cart rumbled on round the hem of Binbawn. Cathal, unable to sleep again, was sitting on his bag of plants, his pipe lit and his mind filled with dreams of Maureen and love, memories of the past and hopes of the future.

Cathal was very well-to-do and had some money laid by. His farm in Meenaroodagh was a good strip of land, hill and holm, the former containing bog without bottom,

the latter, fields that rose higher than the biggest flood. A road ran from his door to the spreadfield on the uplands, and possessing a pony and cart he could draw all the turf to the very hearth. The hay dried quickly, and with fair weather to harvest Cathal was sure of a strong winter house, potatoes in piles, meal in plenty from Stranarachary mill, good milking cows and a warm hearth-stone.

Cathal's mother, Sheila Shemus Bawn, was a great worker, with ready hands for any job, washing, baking, milking and herding the cows, letting ropes, rickling turf, spreading manure on the potato ridges. Three cows were under her care in the byre, and she had many ducks and hens, all good layers and easy feeders. In fact the whole farm was a very good one, none like it in the barony, with fields well fenced, turf snugly clamped and hay and corn neatly stacked. The thatched and limewashed home of Cathal Cassidy had a hearty door for the woman to be, for Maureen O'Malley.

When Cathal Cassidy encountered Micky Og on the road near Binbawn and heard of the fallen Bridge of Cleena, he turned his horse round and drove back again. From where he turned the road to the summit of Crinnan was five miles by Cleena Brae, but going back, circling Binbawn and taking the Doon Well road, the journey would be lengthened by a league and more. It was the only way home now; the Dungarrow-Kineeragh road ran through a land of bog and mire, and it was impossible for a wheeled vehicle to make headway outside the confines of the highway.

Cleena Bridge was a very rude construction made by the peasantry. The structure was one of the simplest; two beams of bog oak were laid across a mountain stream, their ends resting on the banks at opposite sides. Transverse boards were laid from beam to beam; these were nailed down and the structure was complete. For years this bridge, when the weather was dry, carried the traffic from many a fair. In the wet weather the roads which it joined were absolutely impossible for a vehicle with wheels. But

now that the bridge was down Cathal Cassidy was in no way surprised. For many a long day he had marveled that it should stand so long.

In the morning at one o'clock he arrived at the house of Columb Ruagh Keeran on the Crinnan cross-roads.

FINALITY

Once 'twas my song at a ball,
My dance at a wedding;
But now the bones of me call
For bed and bedding:
Sheet and sheeting that's sound,
And I will go off in
Pomp to the house in the ground,
The clay, in a coffin.

'Tis seed-time at Candlemas,
Then, there let it!
There are, when I come to pass,
Fine men to set it;
Men, and them hale and strong—
Of breed and breeding.
Their hands won't idle long,
Sowing and seeding!

It's a brave turf fire the night
In the house I've grown old in—
A narrow home is in sight,
But room to grow cold in!
Is it Candlemas now with its rain?
Or Lammas Day with the mowing?
Neither will know me again,
And it time to be going.

CHAPTER XI

The Ancients

TOWARDS noon of the same day, news of a tragedy, grave and horrible, began to pass from lip to lip through all the cabins from Crinnan in the hills to Drimeeney on the sea. The police in force and fully armed passed eastwards through Meenarood and Meenaroodagh. Then came the newspapermen on motor cars with notebooks and pencils and cameras. They took photos of the byre which was once Maureen's home, of the house by the Crinnan cross-roads, the house of Columb Ruagh Keeran, and the cabin where lived Sheila Shemus Bawn, the mother of the Sein Feiner Cathal Cassidy. The telegraph wires of Stranarachary hummed, carrying abroad the details of a great crime, a Sein Fein tragedy, which on that night would be an extra course for a Dublin dinner, and on the morning to be a titbit for the London breakfast-table.

It was rumored that armed soldiers were already on their way towards Stranarachary, their remedial bayonets in readiness. For what? For something that surged higher than the administration of man, an ancient passion, which like a new thought brooked no dominance and admitted no hindrance.

The news of the tragedy gripped Dungarrow like mighty tentacles, drawing the people together as a rake draws the wisps of a haggard into one heap. Never in the memory of the oldest was such an assemblage under one roof as that which filled the house of Condy Heelagh when darkness had fallen. The old had gotten new vigor into their bones, the young were frightened and stared one at the other with wild eyes; the men were silent and the women wept while they prayed.

Coy Fergus Beeragh, bed-ridden for the past three weeks and hastening death by leaving his blankets, was there. Condy Heelagh had left his customary seat by the fire and was up and about, taking the greatest interest in things which had not attracted his attention for many years; the delf on the dresser, the hang of the lamp suspended from the roof-beam, the curve and finish of his long-discarded last. Sally Rourke told her beads, her eyes and ears open to the expressions on the neighbors' faces and the words that they spoke. Cassie Shemus Meehal was there, the clay as yet unsettled over her man that was. But nothing was now out of place. The end of the world was near at hand, surely.

"The sojers are comin'," said Condy Heelagh. "That's the talk on the road now."

"Under God, the day and the night," said Peggy Ribbig, her wrinkle-lidded eyes trembling wearily as if she were waking from a sleep.

"*Shid a vaha Wuirra,*" sobbed Sally Rourke, giving utterance to the first words of the Ave to show that the calamity had bitten deeply into her heart.

"The three iv them, all in one night!" said Cassie Shemus Meehal. She was standing upright, and the shadow of her long, black form swayed backwards and forwards on the earthen floor.

"And the floor was covered with gold, in the ashes and under the bed," said Peggy Ribbig with a husky groan. "The polis will have their hands on all iv it."

"Micky Og saw the three iv them lyin' dead in the house," said Liam Logan. "Columb Ruagh with his head in the ashes and it walloped in, and Cathal beside the door with a bullet through him."

"And Maureen was lyin' on the bed, dead," said some one from near the door.

"It was maybe one iv *the* guns," said Sally Rourke, crossing herself while her face contracted as if she were terrified of something.

"There's no guns, I hear," said the voice from the door.

The speaker was Corney McKelvie. "Columb Ruagh sold them back to the polis."

"Micky Og's out iv his mind, too," said Liam Logan, clutching a chair convulsively and fixing a hard look on the fire.

"It's past talkin' about," said Cassie Shemus Meehal.

"It is that," whimpered Coy Fergus Beeragh with a cold shudder, raising his arm to his chin, then dropping it to his side and sinking into himself again.

"If Maldy Kennedy were to see this day," said Condy Heelagh, setting four wet turf upright, head to head, on the ash-powdered embers of the hearth.

"Aye that! And Nancy Logan, too, God rest her!" said Sally Rourke, trickling her beads through her fingers.

"One wouldn't wonder if it was only Maureen Malley," groaned Anne Heelagh in a thick voice.

"Aye, if it was one itself, but three iv them, God rest them!" Peggy Ribbig moaned. "Was a thing like it ever seen or heard tell iv in the whole wide world!"

"I mind once, fifty years ago," said Coy Fergus Beeragh in a wheezy voice, as he sat down on a chair near him. "Fifty years the Christmas past or the Christmas comin', I'm not sure. And there was a man—"

THE END

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